

Future of magnificent garden secured

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The HLF grant, gives the green light to the plans by English Heritage to restore one of Britain's finest landscape gardens to its original splendour. Wrest Park is one of the country's largest 'secret gardens' in that for many decades it was part of an agricultural research centre, its treasures overgrown and largely unknown.

From June 2011, visitors will see the first fruits of this restoration when the Italian and Rose Gardens will be unveiled, completely conserved and reinstated. An historic gardens apprenticeship scheme will give eight novice gardeners the opportunity to be involved in the restoration while gaining valuable skills and qualifications.

Within the magnificent French-inspired mansion, the Countess' Sitting Room will be restored and will also open to the public in June next year while an exciting new exhibition will tell the story of the estate, its evolution and its personalities. New facilities including a café and play area will ensure that visitors can – in between exploring the house and landscape – relax in comfort.

Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, welcomed the news: "We are delighted to receive this generous grant and vote of confidence from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Wrest Park and its outstanding collection of historic garden buildings is one of the finest surviving eighteenth century landscapes in Britain. It is also one of our best kept secrets and few know of its magnificence. Our restoration will reverse years of neglect and bring this once famous and beautiful landscape back into the limelight."

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "Wrest Park is a wonderful hidden gem in the Bedfordshire countryside. The Heritage Lottery Fund's grant will help restore the landscape and make people's visiting experience a much richer and more enjoyable one. We are particularly pleased to be supporting an apprenticeship scheme for eight novice gardeners at the Park - something that is particularly close to our hearts as we believe that paid training opportunities are vital to keep alive essential heritage skills."

Wrest Park belonged to the de Grey family from the Middle Ages until the early 20th century. The family commissioned many of the 18th century's most famous designers including Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, William Kent, Batty Langley and Thomas Archer. But whereas in other gardens the previous designs were lost in the pursuit of new gardening vogues, each generation at Wrest Park respected the work of their predecessors. As a result, visitors today to Wrest Park can see the complete evolution over both the 18th and 19th century of one of this country's greatest contributions to Western civilisation – the English landscape garden.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Wrest Park housed an agricultural research institute. English Heritage gained ownership of the estate in 2006 and in 2008, following a detailed appraisal of the Grade I listed mansion and Grade I registered landscape, announced a 20 year Master Plan to restore Wrest Park as one of the pre-eminent gardens in England.

Notes to editors

Visitor Information for Wrest Park

English Heritage is the government's lead body for the historic environment in England and is responsible for protecting the best of the country's unique legacy of historic buildings, landscapes and archaeological sites for the benefit of this and future generations. www.english-heritage.org.uk

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)** sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

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