Kew’s historic Temperate House to be restored

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This will not only enable vital conservation of the Grade I listed heritage building, the largest Victorian glasshouse in the world, but will result in a more inspiring public display for visitors and help broaden awareness of the importance of plants through learning and engagement programmes with community groups. It will enhance the care of the invaluable scientific collection of plants housed within it.

Richard Deverell, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, says: "We are delighted to be given this opportunity to preserve and transform the Temperate House, one of Kew’s most important heritage buildings.

"This project represents a real step change in the way in which Kew will communicate and bring to life why plants matter, why saving them matters and ultimately why Kew’s science and horticultural expertise matters.

"The Temperate House is the perfect backdrop in which to tell the extraordinary stories of the contemporary relevance of plants to us all. It is home to some of our rarest and most useful plants. What’s more, the sheer range of the locations these plants hail from – the Mediterranean, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South and Central America, Asia and the Pacific Islands – offers us an opportunity to make a special connection with the diverse visitors we welcome to Kew.

"We want to use the Temperate House to open up visitors’ minds and imaginations to look at plants and Kew in a new light."

The project, managed by Turner and Townsend on behalf of Kew, will return the Temperate House to its former glory, restructure the plant displays and rejuvenate the existing plant collection. The adjoining Evolution House will be converted into a centre for public engagement, supported by a bespoke volunteer programme. Kew’s commitment to teaching and enthusing a new generation about plants will be given a boost with a new science education strand added to the schools programme. A Historic Glasshouse Apprenticeship Scheme will train a new generation in heritage restoration and horticulture.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, says, "The Temperate House is both a remarkable feat of Victorian engineering and home to one of the world’s most famous botanical collections. We’re delighted to be funding urgent conservation work to secure the building’s future as well as a number of complementary training and volunteering opportunities. This is a real milestone project for Kew and we look forward to watching it progress over the coming year."

The Temperate House restoration project is about more than just preserving this Victorian architectural gem. As part of Kew’s Breathing Planet fundraising campaign, the project is a catalyst for change in how Kew inspires its visitors to engage with the beauty, complexity and importance of plants. The glasshouse, designed by Decimus Burton, embodies what Kew is about: a rich history and heritage, a world-renowned collection of plants, and a science programme that focuses on the potential plants have to play in addressing challenges such as food security and climate change.

Sir David Attenborough, world renowned broadcaster and naturalist, says: "Kew’s Breathing Planet Campaign will help protect the world’s plants, the basis for all life on the planet. In a time of unprecedented global change, it could not be more important."

Environment Minister, Lord de Mauley, says: "The expansion of the iconic Temperate House will allow Kew to continue to educate and fascinate the hundreds of thousands who visit every year.

"This is why we're supporting the project to make sure Kew can carry out the necessary work to bring the Temperate House up to date."

Alongside the £14.7m HLF grant, Defra (the Government department that provides approximately half of Kew's funding) has contributed £10.4m and Kew has raised an additional £7.7m for the project from private donors. The £34.3m restoration project will be completed in May 2018.

The Temperate House is the largest surviving Victorian glasshouse structure in the world, originally opened in 1863. It has undergone a number of major refurbishments over the years, the last one commencing 35 years ago. It is home to some of the world's most useful plants: a date palm (Phoenix dactylifera); tea bush (Camellia sinensis), from which the nation's favourite brew is made; a specimen of a quinine tree (Cinchona officinalis), historically used as a treatment for malaria; and the South African balloon pea (Sutherlandia frutescens), which is used in a tonic in rural areas to alleviate symptoms associated with AIDS and cancer. It also houses some of the rarest, such as a South African cycad (Encephalartos woodii). Only one specimen of this cycad has ever been found growing in the wild, and that has long since disappeared. This species now exists only in botanic gardens. Other rare plants include Saint Helena ebony (Trochetiopsis ebenus) from St Helena, only two specimens are growing in the wild on the island and Kew's ex-situ conservation work has been invaluable to secure the future of this species.

Notes to editors

Kew has raised an additional £7.7m for the project from private donors, including:

- Eddie and Sue Davies
- The Wolfson Foundation
- The Garfield Weston Foundation
- The Linbury Trust
- The J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust

In 2011 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded Kew a development fund of £890,000 towards the Temperate House restoration project.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a world famous scientific organisation, internationally respected for its outstanding living collection of plants and world-class Herbarium as well as its scientific expertise in plant diversity, conservation and sustainable development in the UK and around the world. Kew Gardens is a major international visitor attraction. Its landscaped 132 hectares and RBG Kew's country estate, Wakehurst Place, attract over 1.5 visits every year. Kew was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2003 and celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2009.

Wakehurst Place is home to Kew's Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild plant seed bank in the world. Kew is a non-departmental public body with exempt charitable status and receives approximately half its funding from Government through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Further funding needed to support Kew's vital work comes from donors, membership and commercial activity including ticket sales.

Further information

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Images of the Temperate House are available from the Kew press office. Please contact the press office for a user name and password.