Royal residence becomes the people's palace

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Once home to the young princess Victoria and the place where she first set eyes on her beloved Prince Albert, Grade I listed Kensington Palace lies at the hub of English architectural development in the 17th and 18th centuries, representing styles such as Dutch Baroque, Queen Anne, and Palladianism. Both palace and gardens are to be transformed into a palace for the people, aided by a second round* grant of just under £1million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) it was announced today.

The HLF grant provides an important contribution towards Historic Royal Palaces' £12million major project, 'Welcome to Kensington – a palace for everyone'. It will be financed by Historic Royal Palaces with support from donors, sponsors, trusts and foundations, transforming Kensington into an exciting, educational and inspirational visitor experience and opening up the palace's rich and varied stories to the widest possible audience. On completion in 2012 visitors will be able to more fully enjoy the palace's rich heritage and benefit from major improvements including:

- New public gardens inspired by the historic layout of the area, opening up the palace and linking it once again to the neighbouring park
- A new visitor entrance leading directly from the Broad Walk and Round Pond, and a new outdoor space for public use and enjoyment
- Free admission for children to the palace and exhibitions, and fun, engaging events and activities for families to enjoy
  Greatly improved physical access in and around the palace with the addition of a lift to all public floors
- An inner central 'hub' free of charge to enter, where visitors will get a feel for what Kensington Palace has to offer inside, that they can explore further or simply stop to enjoy refreshments in a new café
- Clearer routes and signage to enable visitors to better explore the many historic treasures inside
- New education and community facilities and programmes

Kensington Palace has been home to some of the country's most charismatic and best-known royals, including George II, Queen Victoria, Princess Margaret and Diana, Princess of Wales. Originally built in 1605 as a private country house, it was purchased in 1689 by King William III and Queen Mary II, eager to escape the 'grime' of Whitehall. They immediately ordered major improvements to the Jacobean mansion to make it fit for royal residence. The palace includes contributions from some of the most renowned architects of the past three centuries, including Sir Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor, Sir John Vanbrugh, John Nash, Colin Campbell and William Kent.

The stories of Kensington's fascinating personalities will be shared with visitors through a series of permanent displays, starting with Queen Victoria. This intimate exhibition will explore the story of the young princess's life growing up in the palace, her relationship with Prince Albert, his subsequent death and the Queen's long period of mourning. Visitors will be able to visit the rooms where young Victoria lived and through collections of pertinent and historical objects discover more about the royal couple and their family life.

The project will also link Kensington Palace to the National Curriculum for the first time through the creation of learning facilities and an education programme that will target young people and their families, in addition to working with local community groups. There will be dedicated spaces to accommodate formal and informal learners, and a training

programme will also be launched for volunteers and front-line staff, including apprenticeship opportunities.

Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund committee for London, said: “British history flows through Kensington Palace like an ever-rolling stream. For 320 years this fabulous palace and the marvellously serene landscape surrounding it have been shaped and moulded by many of the great figures of our common past. Now thanks to this Heritage Lottery Fund award new generations will be able to enjoy and learn from the palace, through greatly enhanced access and educational programmes, the reuniting of the Palace with the magnificent vistas from and to central London, and the retelling of so many great stories. William and Mary’s escape from the 'Airs and smokes' of the metropolis; Hanoverian grand designs; the formative years of great Queens; the lives of troubled Princesses - all told amidst the splendid architecture, art and gardens."

Michael Day, Chief Executive of Historic Royal Palaces, said: “Historic Royal Palaces is delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund is making this generous contribution to our exciting project that will see Kensington Palace transformed in time for the Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee in 2012. Our fundraising total now stands at just over £8 million, and work is well underway to secure the remaining £4 million over the next two years towards our target of £12 million.”

Major works will begin in June 2010 and are scheduled for completion in June 2012 in time for the Queen’s 60th Jubilee and the London Olympics.