Tropical Ravine awarded £2.3million Lottery grant

29/11/2013

The exciting project has received a £2.3m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to safeguard the future of the Tropical Ravine House and its significant plant collection

Belfast City Council, which owns the building, will also contribute £1.5m, as part of its Investment Programme for the city, along with a generous contribution from the Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens, bringing the overall value of the refurbishment up to £4m.

Built between 1887 and 1902 by the park's head gardener, Charles McKimm and his staff, the listed Ravine House contains species such as banana, cinnamon, bromeliad and orchid, as well as some of the oldest seed plants around today. It was designed as a sunken ravine over which visitors can view the array of tropical and subtropical plants from a raised balcony. A fine example of Victorian design, the building is now in need of urgent repairs.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: “The restoration of the Tropical Ravine and its hugely important botanical collection will safeguard this heritage and provide a real boost to the tourist offering in Belfast. There will be lots of activities to open up and increase people’s enjoyment and knowledge of the built and natural heritage of the site, creating an entertaining and educational experience for both new and returning visitors.

“Each year 30,000 people visit the Tropical Ravine and this project will help attract more visitors. The new experience through the restored building and collection, combined with information panels, interactive exhibits and digital displays will help people treasure this local but often overlooked heritage gem. We are delighted to be involved”.

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, also welcomed the award. “Belfast City Council is committed to investing in our facilities so they can be enjoyed and used by as many people as possible, so this is great news for Botanic Gardens and the thousands of people who use it every day,” he said.

“When we launched our Investment Programme last year, we pledged to work with others to improve what our city has to offer and to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. Today’s announcement shows the value of this approach, with the council contributing a further £1.5m towards protecting this much-loved building, while introducing it to a new generation of visitors.

“We have already delivered, or are in the process of delivering, more than £48m of capital projects, with 12 schemes completed and another nine on the ground, and the restoration of the Tropical Ravine represents another major investment into our city.”

The HLF and other funding will be used to secure the structure of the building and safeguard the plant collection. The distinct Victorian features such as the walkways, windows and brickwork that give the building its unique character will be restored, with original water features and lighting effects reinstated and the failed roofing system replaced.

The plant collection will benefit from the addition of new environmental controls to aid heating, ventilation and humidity. An on-going conservation and management programme will be put in place to include pruning, replacement and replanting of specimens.

Guided tours of the lower level will also be offered for the first time. Joint events and activities will be hosted with other heritage and tourist sites including the Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Lyric Theatre and Queen's University to reach new audiences and raise awareness of the Tropical Ravine.

Notes to editors

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £184million to over 1,000 projects across Northern Ireland.

Belfast City Council's Investment Programme aims to boost the economy through capital investment, supporting communities and developing job and training opportunities, particularly for the long-term unemployed and young people. The total value of the programme is £364m, which includes £301m towards physical improvements, £34m in economic support and £29m towards people, communities and neighbourhoods. For more information, visit the Belfast City website.

Further information

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