Jane Austen's much loved park to be revitalised as

Sydney Gardens historic labyrinth

In need of urgent repairs, the Grade II registered Sydney Gardens - one of the UK's only surviving Georgian Pleasure Gardens and local park of novelist Jane Austen - will have a new lease of life thanks to an investment of £2,742,300 National Lottery money.

They were designed for entertainment and wellbeing in the late 18th century and had a keen visitor in Jane Austen. Just before she moved within view of them in 1801, she wrote: "It would be very pleasant to be near Sydney Gardens! We might go to the Labyrinth every day." Alongside a jaunt through the labyrinth, a visit to a pleasure garden was a time to mix and socialise with minimal supervision, and maybe even meet a potential partner.

Since Jane Austen's day the park has fallen into decline. But soon, thanks to the grant awarded jointly by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund, today's visitors will be able to enjoy a rejuvenated 21st-century pleasure gardens.

They will be able to make use of a new café, play areas for all ages, a changing places facility (accessible changing rooms and toilets) and community spaces, alongside the soon to be restored Grade II listed Loggia, Minerva's Temple, Edwardian toilets and grade II* listed canal footbridges. New areas of garden with wild flowers and planting for pollinating insects will be introduced and areas of the park currently closed to the public will be reopened. Four tennis courts will be refurbished and a new labyrinth-in-grass will be included for modern day Jane Austens.

Funding success for six parks

Sydney Gardens is one of six parks receiving National Lottery money totalling £13.8million, reinvigorating them as vital community spaces by restoring historic features and planting; creating new facilities including play areas, cafes and toilets; and improving habitats for wildlife.

The Heritage Lottery Fund's Chief Executive Ros Kerslake said, on behalf of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund: "The health and wellbeing benefits of local green spaces were well known in Jane Austen's time and remain true today. They are home to some of the country's most cherished heritage and provide fantastic opportunities for enterprise and community activities. Over £950million of National Lottery money has been invested in regenerating public parks and urban green spaces so far and they remain a priority into the future."

The 6 parks are:

South Cliff Gardens in Scarborough's South Bay - £4.66m
Castle Park in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire - £1.94m
Sydney Gardens in Bath - £2.74m
Fairhaven Lake and Gardens on the Fylde coast, Lancashire £1.47m
Ellington Park in Ramsgate, Kent - £1.64m
Stevens Park in Dudley - £1.4m

South Cliff Gardens in Scarborough's South Bay

The enchanting South Cliff Gardens stretch for 1.5km along the steep cliff slopes of Scarborough's South Bay. The town became England's first seaside resort following the discovery of spa waters in 1626. The claim that drinking these minerals was good for health drew visitors from across the country and led to the establishment of a thriving health and wellbeing destination, comprising sea front spa buildings and promenade, gardens and cliff-top esplanade.

The gardens have deteriorated significantly in recent times and are currently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register. This funding will be used to reverse this decline, reviving its horticulture, enhancing habitats for wildlife and restoring numerous historic features, including the 'Italian steps' designed by Sir Joseph Paxton, architect of Crystal Palace. Historic shelter buildings, a clock-tower, a pedestrian tunnel, railings, fencing, benches, footpaths and walls will also be restored, and a new family hub area and operations centre will be installed. The restoration and building work will be supported by a wide range of heritage interpretation and activities, with opportunities for training and volunteering.

Castle Park in Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire

Bishops Stortford's Sworders Field and Castle Gardens will be brought together and transformed to form Castle Park. The park's name derives from the ruined Waytemore Castle located within its grounds, which dates back to at least the 1080s. It was largely demolished in the late 14th Century but its Grade I listed remnants stand proudly in the landscape today as a precious reminder of Britain's medieval past. The remnants have been increasingly eroded by weather and foot traffic over the last century and were categorised as Risk 1, Priority A on the council's Heritage at Risk Register in 2006. Access to the castle is now restricted.

Specialist conservation work will protect the ruins and allow for public access, lighting and new history information panels. Other disused buildings in the park will be transformed into a park hub, which will include community rooms, café, toilets and a Changing Places facility (highly accessible toilet/changing room) and the River Stort, running through the park, will be rejuvenated to create a valuable wildlife habitat. A series of community activities including archaeological investigations and tree planting will take place.

Ellington Park in Ramsgate, Kent

Ellington Park, originally part of the Ellington estate, has a rich history stretching back to the 13th century. Smugglers' tunnels run underneath the ground and memento mori plaques show local responses to Charles I's beheading. It has long been central to the local community, with activities including plays, firework shows, concerts and beauty contests taking place in the park. The 1934 Ramsgate pageant attracted over 4,000 people, and the park hosted an emotional visit from the Mayors of Calais, Boulogne and Dunkirk at the end of the Second World War.

This funding will restore the park's dilapidated Victorian bandstand, benches, lamps, gates, terrace walls/balustrades, rockery, original paths and planting and improvements will be made to the wildlife garden and miniature railway. A new café and playground will be installed, to include community space and accessible toilets, and opportunities for community involvement will be central to all of the activities, especially through a close partnership with the Friends group.

Fairhaven Lake and Gardens on the Fylde coast, Lancashire

Built in the late 19th century, Fairhaven is one of the UK's first recreation marine lakes – a lake that is situated next to the sea and contains both sea and rain water. It hit its heyday in the 1950s/60s, when it attracted crowds of up to 15,000 to watch boat races and take part in various water sports and leisure activities. It is also an internationally important nature and wildlife site, including for a large population of glass eels, identified as one of the most threatened species in the UK.

Usage of the lake and gardens has declined in recent times, but with this funding the park will eventually remain open 7 days a week, all year round. The lake's landscape and water quality will be improved, helping to reduce fish and eel deaths, and there will be an increase in water sports and other community and volunteering activities. The park café and previously much-loved Japanese water garden, infilled in the 1980s, will be restored to their former glory and the pagoda and boathouse will be transformed into spaces for community activities and history exhibitions.

Stevens Park in Quarry Bank, Dudley

The land occupied by Stevens Park was owned by the Papacy in 1182 and has since been used as a hunting ground, grazing land, woodland for charcoal production and has been covered in collieries and quarries. It was donated to the Borough of Dudley as Stevens Park by industrialist Ernest Stevens in the 1920s. It is home to a Victorian farmhouse and coach house (Tintern House), an ornate bandstand and the unusual Grade II listed Peace Gardens. There are very few parks with peace memorials, most being war memorials, and they were unique when introduced to Stevens Park in 1931. The park was well-used throughout the 20th century, including in 1972 when the carnival was opened by Diana Dors.

Tintern House currently has damp and rotten timbers throughout, and the Peace Gardens were gated off following the theft of brass memorial plaques in 2008. Access and security to the peace gardens will be improved and Tintern House will undergo extensive refurbishment. When it reopens it will host the Emily Jordan Foundation, which supports people with learning disabilities through skills and training sessions - at Stevens Parks these will include bike maintenance, metal recycling and horticulture. Improvements will also be made to the bandstand, gates, footpaths, entrances and the park's biodiversity.

Notes to editors

Since 1996, more than £950million raised by National Lottery players has been used to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks and cemeteries across the UK. Find out more about how to apply .

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLottery and #HLFsupported.

About Big Lottery Fund

We are the largest community funder in the UK – we're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since June 2004, we have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9billion to projects that have benefited millions of people.

We are passionate about funding great ideas that matter to communities and make a difference to people's lives. At the heart of everything we do is the belief that when people are in the lead, communities thrive. Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, our funding is open to everyone. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.