

Avenue House Estate Trust has today received confirmation of a £2.1million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery's Parks for People programme. The grant will be used to restore this Grade II listed landscape, which was originally created for the ink magnate Henry Stephens by leading 'gardenesque' landscape designer, Robert Marnock.

This grant is part of a wider investment of £34.5million of Lottery money to 13 parks across the UK being announced today by HLF and Big Lottery Fund. This new funding follows the publication of the HLF's recent report (26 June) which revealed the UK's public parks are at serious risk of decline unless innovative new ways of funding and maintaining them are found.

Alongside restoration of important historic features including bandstands and gatehouses, and the installation of new community facilities including a skateboard park and children's play areas, this new funding will also deliver a range of activities designed to help parks across the UK to be more sustainable.

Two decades of public and Lottery investment has ensured that the majority of UK parks are in better condition. However, the *State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk?* report has revealed they are now at serious risk of rapid decline and even being sold off and lost to the public forever. The gardens of Avenue House have suffered from under-investment for decades and this project will restore many of the principal features of the original Marnock design, including the terrace, pond, rockery and wet garden, Water Tower and the Bothy Garden. In addition, the Grade II listed stable block will be converted into a new café bistro and the garage to an Activity Centre. The toilets will be greatly

improved and an improved play area provided with a new kiosk nearby.

The project also includes funding to train both staff and volunteers, including two new apprentice gardener positions, and will offer more opportunities for users of the gardens to learn about and celebrate its heritage.

Henry Stephens left his estate to Finchley Urban District Council on his death in 1918 and the gardens have been open to the public since 1928. The estate has been a key centre of the Finchley Church End community ever since: the UDC received its warrant to become a borough there in 1933, and it was the location for Finchley's VE Day celebrations in 1945. In 2002 the charitable Avenue House Estate Trust leased the Estate for 125 years, and it now manages it, as Stephens House and Gardens, as an events venue and for free public use of the gardens.

Andy Savage, Chairman of the Avenue House Estate Trust, said: "We are absolutely delighted that we have been awarded this grant. With this funding and the support that we have received from the Borough of Barnet, other charitable bodies and our own supporters, we are now able to fully restore many of the features that Marnock originally designed and show off our wonderful landscape and beautiful tree collection to maximum advantage, as well as providing much-improved facilities to the users of the gardens."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said on behalf of HLF and the Big Lottery Fund: "Our report revealed how valued public parks are by people and communities, and how essential they are to our physical and emotional well-being. That's why HLF and the Big Lottery fund have invested over £700m in parks since 1996. But the report makes clear that our parks face an uncertain future and so it's exciting to see how this new investment is going some way towards helping parks like Avenue House find new ways of funding and maintaining them so they are still here to be enjoyed long into the future."

Further information

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£34.5m Lottery investment in UK's public parks