Grant 'greenlight' could see Preston Park blossom

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The HLF first-round pass* means that Stockton Council, who own and manage Preston Hall Museum & Park, can progress to the second stage of the HLF application process. The Council will now submit more detailed plans to secure the £300,000 of HLF support needed to complete the works. A decision is expected in spring 2011.

The project will see the currently derelict walled garden area and old orchard transformed back to its Victorian splendour where fruit, vegetables and herbs will be grown alongside traditional herbaceous planting. Planting will be complemented by the introduction of a vine house, cold frames and space for beehives. Essential restoration will also be carried out to the walled structure and original pathway.

The confirmation from HLF is a further boost to the ongoing £7million regeneration masterplan for the museum and park which will see the hall itself restored and refurbished thanks to funding from both Stockton Council and HLF.

Councillor Mary Womphrey, Stockton Council's Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture and Leisure, said: "We are delighted to get the green light for this project which will see currently unused areas of the park brought back into use and returned to their former glory.

"The plans will offer visitors a further taste of Victorian life. They will be able to see what it would have been like to work in a Victorian working garden and we hope to provide opportunities for local community groups and volunteers to get their hands dirty and help maintain the restored garden."

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said: "We're extremely pleased to give initial support to Preston Hall Museum & Park for its important plans to conserve its original features and get people involved with this valuable piece of our heritage. This is obviously the beginning of the journey to secure a full Heritage Lottery Fund grant and we look forward to seeing the plans to give Preston Hall Museum & Park a new lease of life progress."

Project coordinators at the Museum & Park are currently calling for willing volunteers to get in touch to help clear the walled garden and orchard site to prepare for the works, which will go ahead once funding is confirmed at the second stage of the HLF application process. If you would like to get involved and are able to help out lifting and clearing flagstones, bushes and vegetation contact Sophie Lunt at the Museum & Park on 01642 527820.

The upgrades to Preston Hall Museum & Park are part of a wider £500m public sector led investment programme by Stockton Council to regenerate the Borough.

Notes to Editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets the Heritage Lottery Fund's criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the **Heritage Lottery Fund** (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK with £209 million in the North East alone.

Further information

Laura Kelsey, Assistant Media Relations Officer for Stockton Council on 01642 528804.

Stockton is the 2010 winner of the Association for Public Service Excellence ‘Council of the Year’ and has received the top ‘excellent’ rating for Use of Resources from the Audit Commission.

After winning the Gold Award for ‘Best City’ in Britain in Bloom 2009, Stockton-on-Tees represented the UK in the European Entente Florale 2010.