Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens secure



Archive image of the Gothic revival Manor House at Kearsney Abbey

The project aims to unlock the heritage, tourism and community value of the most popular parks in the Dover district by:

- restoring a rare example of garden design in Russell Gardens by the renowned Edwardian landscape architect, Thomas Mawson, and promoting it as a major attraction
- restoring the Festival of Britain open air theatre in Kearsney Abbey to bring new audiences to the parks and to host community events
- interpreting the parks' heritage and celebrating links with Dover's industrial past and the mills of the River Dour
- extending the café in Kearsney Abbey to create a multi-use venue with facilities to support new volunteering, training, and education programmes, and for events hire
- providing opportunities for people to get involved through volunteering, and for the community to take greater ownership by creating a 'Friends of Kearsney' group
- improving sustainable travel / access to, between, and within the parks, and
- raising standards to achieve 'Green Flag' status

Development funding of £274,100 has also been awarded to help Dover District Council progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

Cllr Paul Watkins, Leader of Dover District Council, said: “We’re delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund are supporting this exciting project. These parks are highly valued by local people, and it’s great to know that we can now progress our plans to maintain, enhance and interpret this unique heritage alongside opportunities for the community to get involved.”

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, this new funding will also deliver a range of activities designed to help parks across the UK to be more sustainable. At Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens this money is helping to fulfil the parks’ potential as an attraction and events venue with opportunities to generate income to help create a sustainable future for the parks. The project will also involve developing new heritage and horticultural skills and training opportunities for volunteers and apprentices. A formal education programme will increase understanding of the ecology and biodiversity of the parks, as well as their history and links with Dover’s industrial development.

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.

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 Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens find new ways of funding and maintaining them so they are still here to be enjoyed long into the future.”

Notes to editors

- A first-round pass means the project meets our 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. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.
- This announcement can be followed on Twitter #parksmatter
- **State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to risk?**
  To establish a national picture of the state of UK parks HLF commissioned three new UK-wide surveys: a survey of local authority park managers, a survey of park friends and user groups, and a public opinion survey undertaken by Ipsos MORI. The research has also drawn on other pre-existing data to assess how the condition of parks has changed over time, and to cross-check our results. Details of the report findings can be found at State of UK Public Parks
- The Parks for People programme uses Lottery funds to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks and cemeteries. In England the two Lottery Funds have been working in partnership

from 2006 to deliver a multi-million pound investment in public parks of £150m. Find out more about how to apply at our Parks for People programme page

- The Big Lottery Fund is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery. The Fund is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in 2004. It has awarded close to £6bn

About Dover District Council

Dover District Council serves the historic towns of Dover, Deal and Sandwich, and the surrounding rural area. Heritage has shaped the district's sense of place and identity. Dover District Council was the first local authority in the country to publish a Heritage Strategy in line with the National Planning Policy Framework to identify heritage assets and how they could be better protected and managed. Dover District Council is committed to raising the standards of its parks and open spaces. Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens are one of six strategic sites based on their size, historic character and level of usage. Both parks have strong links with Dover's industrial heritage and were developed initially as country houses and estates for local businessmen.

About Russell Gardens

Russell Gardens is Grade II listed in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The gardens are one of the earliest independent commissions by Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) the leading landscape designer of the Edwardian era and an exponent of the Arts & Crafts Movement. Several set-piece photographs of the gardens were included in Mawson's book, *The Art & Craft of Garden Making*, which became a standard reference in its day. The gardens have been in public ownership since 1951 and retain much of their original form and character, including Mawson's signature design features. The magnificent canal pond, Palladian-style pergola bridges and boathouse pavilion form the central architectural features of the park.

About Kearsney Abbey

Directly opposite Russell Gardens, the history of Kearsney Abbey can be traced back to the Norman Conquest. Although never a monastic estate, the park takes its name from the impressive Gothic revival manor house built between 1820-1822. Whilst the majority of the building was demolished in 1959 due to dry rot, the Grade II listed former billiards room serves as a popular café with its ornate original interior. Many other built features of the park have their own Grade II listings. Today Kearsney Abbey is the most popular park in the Dover district with its naturalistic parkland setting characterised by its large lake and a fine collection of specimen and designed tree planting, including Beech, Lime, and Yew. A prominent feature is a Cedar of Lebanon believed to be one of the oldest of its kind in the country.

Further information

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