Locals to get gardening at two of the borough's most beautiful houses

21/06/2011

Adults and young people will have the chance to learn more about the National Trust's 17th century Ham House and its garden thanks to a programme of events that will include artwork, early music and the history of the property. On the other side of the River Thames at Horace Walpole's newly restored Strawberry Hill a community garden will be created with an educational project taking the grounds of the mansion and its history as inspiration.

The two projects are linked as apprentices taken on to plan and manage the Strawberry Hill community garden will be working towards a nationally recognised horticultural diploma and spend some of their time gaining experience at Ham House, as well as other heritage locations in the borough.

Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London Sue Bowers said: "These two exquisite gardens and the wonderful properties of which they form the setting are the inspiration for two exciting projects that will engage in a variety of imaginative ways their neighbouring communities. This will awaken local interest, increase knowledge and impart new skills to those involved."

Garden of Reason - Ham House
Ham House's 400-year old garden, which is listed Grade II*, is currently being restored by the National Trust using historic documents, plans and drawings that date from the 1600s and 1670s when the property was owned by Elizabeth Murray, Countess of Dysart. The latest project, Garden of Reason, which has attracted a £50,000 HLF grant, includes the opportunities for local young people to take on the role of young curators to learn about the development of the garden and the house during a period of great social and cultural upheaval.

Members of Ham Youth Centre will learn about 17th century music and will create their own multi media artwork. Women from the Ham Multicultural Women's Support Group and the Ham United Group – a community organisation – will produce an illustrated guide to The Status Garden created by Elizabeth Murray, additional material for visitors, and an animated film for the House website.

For Ham House, Tessa Fitzjohn, project curator, said: "The project meets the National Trust's 'going local' strategy, and will provide for the first time an opportunity for young people and community groups to research the heritage of Ham House and create visitor information working with artists and heritage specialists."

Community Garden - Strawberry Hill House
At Strawberry Hill the restored grounds are being opened free to the public for the first time in two centuries. Listed Grade II, it was one of the first 'romantic' gardens of the 18th century with informality at its heart. The Strawberry Hill Trust is restoring a four-acre plot that, with the aid of a £49,100 HLF grant, will include a community garden with an emphasis on 'growing food for fun' focussing on herbs and medicinal plants. An educational programme for schoolchildren will be developed and apprenticeships launched. A woodland heritage trail for families will also be created.

Director at Strawberry Hill House Nick Smith said: “We were delighted to be chosen by HLF for this grant. The Growing Together project will engage the whole community in the joy of gardening and help develop a great understanding of this historic landscape. What’s more, partnering with the National Trust in this project will really help our apprentices grow as well!”

Notes to editors

- Ham House is a 17th century mansion with a largely formal garden, offering a visitor attraction as well as a fantastic source of volunteering opportunities for members of the local community. Rich in history and atmosphere, Ham is largely the vision of Elizabeth Murray, Countess of Dysart, who was deeply embroiled in the politics of the English Civil War and subsequent restoration of the monarchy. The property is owned by the National Trust and contains a wealth of information to inform both visitors and volunteers about life, fashions, garden design, art and working conditions in the 1600s, through training, tours, documentation and guides on different areas of the property.
- For more information on Ham House please visit the National Trust website.
- Horace Walpole’s neo-Gothic mansion at Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, has recently seen the completion of a two-year restoration at a cost of £9million. Some £4.9million of the cost was met by a grant from the HLF. The Strawberry Hill Trust was founded in 2002 to restore the Grade I listed property and open it to a wider public. At the core of this restoration project has been the creation of a comprehensive education programme for all ages fully supported by a learning coordinator and a community development coordinator experienced in social inclusion.

Further information

For further information please contact Vicky Wilford, HLF press office, on 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401 937, email vickyw@hlf.org.uk or Phil Cooper on 07889 949 173.

Fliss Coombs, National Trust Press Office (Greater London), on 01494 755 500. Nick Smith, Director at Strawberry Hill House, on 020 8744 1241.