Heritage Lottery Fund to restore Elford's 'lost garden'

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The walled kitchen garden and gardeners cottage is all that remains of the Georgian Elford Hall estate, built in approximately 1825 by Henry Bowes, Earl of Berkshire and Suffolk. Remaining in the family until 1936, the hall, garden and outbuildings were then donated to Birmingham City Council (BCC) as a gift for local residents. After falling into disrepair the hall was demolished in the 1960s and now the remaining garden wall and associated outbuildings are Grade II listed.

The 12ft high wall, measuring 350ft by 300ft, encloses a space that has been largely neglected for the past 50 years and once housed half a mile of fruit trees. The Elford Hall Gardens Management Committee is a voluntary community organisation formed in 2007 by local people determined to rescue it for community use. They will now be able to start work restoring it to its former glory, giving local people the chance to get involved in the work and to cultivate allotments there.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the West Midlands, said: "The community has come together in support of this project to conserve an historic walled garden that will be brought back to productive use after so many years of neglect. Volunteers will be able to gain new skills and schoolchildren learn about nature, local heritage and the environment."

The HLF funded project to restore the walled garden is part of a larger initiative that will see the former head gardener's cottage restored to provide space for a coffee shop, toilets and a classroom. There will be educational activities linked to local schools who have already expressed interest in using the garden for visits.

The Victorian gardens, herbaceous borders and orchard will be re-created, and allotments – a feature of the original gardens – will also be established giving the community an opportunity to take an active part in ensuring the site's sustainability. A bowling green and tennis courts will also be constructed within the garden walls, original structure and pathways restored, and routes made accessible to picnicking areas along the adjacent River Tame. Local people have expressed their enthusiasm for this approach.

Just some of the exciting volunteering and educational opportunities that the HLF project offers are:

- Training and opportunities for participants to learn skills including path laying, fencing, horticultural planning, and learning about environmentally friendly methods of food production.
- A gardening club for all ages with talks, events, and workshops.
- A series of lectures on rural crafts from hedge laying to basket weaving.
- Creation of a local schools heritage trail.
- Working with three local schools to produce new site interpretation.
- A 12 week Princes Trust training programme for fifteen young people who will help plant the orchard and herb garden.

Dave Watton, Chair of the Elford Hall Gardens Management Committee, said: “We are all delighted to receive such substantial backing from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will enable us to deliver this exciting project to maintain an element of Elford’s rural heritage for the benefit of so many people in the years to come.”

Patron Matthew Ellis C.C. Member for Lichfield Rural East and Staffordshire County Councillor explains further about this exciting award and what it means to the local community: "I am really delighted and proud to be associated with this project. This community have a tremendous record of having big aspirations, rolling up their sleeves, working together and making them happen. This particular project was an enormous undertaking and my congratulations go to everyone involved, the visionary who started it off, the Project Manager, Fundraiser, the whole Management Committee and most importantly, the volunteers. When completed it will be an amazing asset not only for Elford but for the whole of Staffordshire and the wider region.”

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project Elford Hall Gardens Project is for £248,400 (72% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £317million to projects in the West Midlands region alone.

To date, grants worth just over £5.5million have been awarded to more than 63 projects in Lichfield from the Heritage Lottery Fund, including a grant of £3.9million to restore its historic city centre parks Beacon Park (including Museum Gardens and Recreation Grounds), Minster Pool and Walk and the Garden of Remembrance.

There have been two Elford Halls; the first built in the early 16th century and which was demolished to make way for a new building around 1825. It was built by Henry Bowes, Earl of Berkshire and Suffolk. The building remained in the Bowes and Howard families until 1936 when, together with its land and outbuildings, it was bequeathed to Birmingham Corporation and was used by the local authority as a store for the city’s art treasures during World War II but afterwards fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1964.

The Elford Garden Wall was built around 1825 and is estimated to contain several million bricks which, it is believed, were brought to the site using the adjacent River Tame. www.elfordhallgarden.org.uk

Further information

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Matthew Ellis’s blog on Elford Hall Garden Project.