Lottery help for laureate’s park project

08/04/2008

The multi-faceted learning project has been created by the Letcombe Brook Charitable Trust which established the park twelve years ago as a memorial to Sir John who lived in the town for many years.

The park already has a poetry trail of six stones inscribed with lines from some of his work by the sculptor, Alec Peever. Now this will be augmented by three information boards about the former poet laureate, each set adjacent to a seating area. An education programme, run by a learning co-ordinator, will involve several local schools with a series of open days and three specially conceived drama productions.

Local volunteers, ranging from young people to adults, will be involved in conserving and looking after the park and learning more about its wildlife and natural features, as well as Sir John’s own concerns for protecting both natural and man-made heritage.

On the year he was appointed poet laureate, 1972, he wrote ‘On Leaving Wantage’ which begins: 'I like the way these old brick garden walls unevenly run down to Letcombe Brook. I like the mist of green about the elms in earliest leaf-time.'

The project has come about in response to numerous requests to the Trustees for information about the park’s origins and about Sir John, particularly from visitors and those too young to have known about him and his work. As part of the project a website will be created and teaching packs produced for primary and secondary schools.

The 1.25 acre park with its semi-mature woodland close to the centre of Wantage was created by the Trustees in 1997 and is managed by them. The house in which Sir John lived for 20 years is visible from the Park.

For the Letcombe Brook Charitable Trust, Chairman Ralph Cobham, said: “Both the Trustees and many local people involved are delighted by the HLF support. This project will benefit many hundreds of people. These include Wantage area residents, members of local interest groups, visitors to the town and especially school staff and students. We are very grateful for the grant. It will help us both to grow and sustain the Park’s appeal.”

Commenting for the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England, Michelle Davies, said: “Sir John Betjeman’s work and association with the locality may not be widely known among visitors and the younger generation and so this project will help this delightful park to become a valuable learning resource and will encourage more people to volunteer to spread the message and become involved in its upkeep.”

Notes to editors

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and beauty spots or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation’s heritage for everyone to enjoy. Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded over £378 million to more than 2,660 projects in South East England.

Further information

Phil Cooper, HLF Press Office on 07889 949173 or
Samantha Goody on 020 7591 6033.

Ralph Cobham, Letcombe Brook Charitable Trust Chair, on 01235 766264.