Nature is brought to life in Bute Park’s new children’s play features

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It sounds like a passage from a story book, but from next month children will be able to enjoy several new, exciting, outdoor play features within Bute Park.

Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure and Culture, Cllr Huw Thomas, said: "These interesting and unique features of natural play scattered across Bute Park are a fantastic way for children to learn and interact with nature.

"In an age where nature is increasingly in competition with digital media for children's attention, these features invite imagination-led play in a healthy outdoor environment. They have been robustly made and installed with the intention of being inspiring play objects that families can enjoy throughout the year.

"This is another stem of the Bute Park Restoration Project which continues to enhance our wonderful city centre park as a place of freedom, recreation and enjoyment by all."

The works of art have been carved by sculptor Tom Harvey, who has created similar installations throughout the country and in other high-profile public parks. They depict elements of wildlife and themes that relate to the park, with the aim of encouraging children to enquire, play and explore.

All five large-scale sculptures are linked to different locations throughout the park and are situated in those areas; for example the otter and fish sculpture is next to the river, the 'leaf bridge' is near the footings of an earlier bridge over the River Taff and the hollowed out log with apple tree carvings is on the orchard lawn near the education centre.

There is also a 'stag beetle' in Old Man's Wood, not far from the popular warthog-inspired landscape feature dubbed by some as 'Pumba'. The final sculpture, which is near the Summerhouse, was developed as part of a workshop with local school children.

During the session pupils from St Mary's Catholic Primary School met with carver Tom and learnt about his work. They then all came up with their own ideas modelled in clay . Tom has used this to develop the larger than life carving of a frog, which used an existing fallen tree stump.

The commission was to design, create and install the sculptures discreetly within their environment. They are part of a wider project which, through two other artist's will provide further large scale carvings as additional seats that will fit sympathetically into the Grade I listed, historic landscape of Bute Park and weather naturally over time.

Tom was appointed through Celfwaith, an agency which develops and promotes public art in Wales. He specialises in wood carving on a large scale using a chainsaw, power tools and hand tools to create smooth surfaces and areas of fine detail.

Tom said: "I work within the tradition of direct carving without the use of scale model and this process of discovery makes the creation of the sculptures all the more dynamic.

"Oak and other woods native to Britain are my preferred materials to carve as they are readily available and work better within the environment. This project was of particular significance to me as I am deeply interested in the relationship between man and nature."

The carvings are part of the Bute Park Restoration Project, which is funded by a £3.1m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF Wales, said: "Bute Park is a haven for the city and this latest development will enhance the overall visitor offer for families.

"Heritage is about sharing what's important to us and passing it on to future generations to explore. These fun new carvings will encourage children to enjoy the park, learn about its history and create lasting memories that they too will want to pass on one day."

Notes to editors

Photos taken by Mike Sutton

Further information

Cardiff Council: Danni Janssens, Press Officer on 029 2087 2409, email: djanssens@cardiff.gov.uk.