Official launch of new play area at historic park

22/03/2012

The project is part of a £1.2million investment in play areas across the town, and was made possible thanks to a £455,000 grant from the Government's Playbuilder programme.

The centrepiece of the play area is a stunning Play Ship built from durable Robinia timber, alongside trampolines, swings and roundabouts.

The park's new wheelchair swing is the only one of its kind in the country and was funded by Social Care and Parents 4 Change.

Safety pathways also boost the park's environmental credentials, having been created using recycled tyres.

The work was carried out by contractors Hellens and outdoor play specialists Jupiter Play and Leisure.

The opening of the new play equipment comes as a major restoration project nears completion in the park which is also home to the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum.

A £9m overhaul – funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG) – has seen major refurbishment of the Victorian estate buildings and the creation of a new visitor centre.

New features include a café as part of a vocational training centre which will be staffed by trainees with disabilities, and a walled garden based on the original built by iron magnate and Middlesbrough founding father Henry Bolckow.

Work on renovating and refurbishing lakes, paths and woodland areas around the park has also been carried out as part of the wider restoration project.

Additional support for the project has come from the Council, the Trustees of Stewart Park, the government's Playbuilder scheme, the Healthy Town Programme, Middlesbrough College and work in kind from the Friends of Stewart Park.

Councillor Brenda Thompson, Middlesbrough Council's Executive Member for Public Health and Sport, said: "Stewart Park is one of the jewels in Middlesbrough's crown and popular attraction for families from far and wide. The award of Playbuilder funding has enabled the creation of a first class play area which will be enjoyed for many years to come. It will enable children – and their parents - to enjoy the thrill of playing outside in a safe environment and help keep them active, healthy and happy."

Councillor Tom Mawston, Chairman of the Friends of Stewart Park, added: "Stewart Park is being transformed into a fantastic amenity both for local people and visitors to Middlesbrough. I'm delighted with the progress that has been made so far and this important investment will stand the area in good stead for generations. This new play area is a terrific addition to the first class facilities that Stewart Park has to offer."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "Stewart Park is a valuable green space in the heart of Middlesbrough and the improvements that have been made so far will transform it into a first-class attraction for the local community and visitors. The new play area is fantastic and will no doubt be a popular feature encouraging young people to come out

into and enjoy their local public park."

Notes to editors

Photo/interview opportunity.

When: Tuesday, 20 March 2012, 10am.

Where: New play area, Stewart Park. (Reporters/photographers are welcome to enter the park via The Grove.)

Who: Middlesbrough Mayor Ray Mallon, up to 100 schoolchildren from Beech Grove, Hemlington Hall, Thorntree, Viewley Hill, St Alphonsus, St Pius X primaries and Priory Woods secondary.

The history of Stewart Park

Stewart Park was opened to the public in 1928 and covers 47 hectares. It was originally laid out as a manor house and deer park in the early 1800s by a wealthy army major, and the entire village of East Marton was removed to create it.

It is most famous as the birthplace of Captain Cook. The site of his cottage is marked by a granite vase in the nearby Captain Cook Birthplace Museum.

The park was once in the ownership of Middlesbrough iron magnate Henry Bolckow in the nineteenth century. His elegant Marton Hall was the centrepiece of the estate which was purchased by Councillor Thomas Dormand Stewart in the 1920s.

He gave the parkland and hall to Middlesbrough residents and Stewart Park was formally opened in 1928. The Hall was demolished in 1960 after much of the building was destroyed by fire.

The park now consists of mature woodland, parkland and an arboretum with two lakes providing habitat for water fowl. The pets' corner is home to domesticated animals, fallow deer, highland cattle, llamas and goats. The park holds nature, heritage, orienteering and tree trails, which are very popular with local schools, and hosts a number of large events, including the Cleveland Show.

Parks for People
The Parks for People programme uses Lottery funds to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks. The programme aims to improve the local environment and put parks firmly back at the heart of community life. In England the two Lottery Funds have been working in partnership since 2006 to deliver a £150m investment in public parks.

Heritage Lottery Fund
HLF is continuing to fund public park projects in 2011/12 with an investment of £20m. The next closing date for applications is 28 February 2012.

Big Lottery Fund (BIG)
BIG, the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out 46% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery. BIG 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 June 2004 BIG has awarded over £4.4bn. Website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

For information

Issued by Angus Hoy, Senior Press Officer, Middlesbrough Council on 01642 729 502.