Lottery awards over £1.8million to the park in the heart of the Garden City

15/10/2009

Howard Park and Gardens are to be transformed thanks to an award of £1.84million made by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG) through the Parks for People programme. This investment will help to conserve the nationally important historic landscape.

Works undertaken as part of the lottery-funded project will include refurbishing the popular paddling pool, creating improved play areas and new routes through and around the park. Pix Brook, a stream running alongside the park, will have a new bridge built and a statue of Sappho will also be reinstated.

At the same time, new facilities will be introduced for visitors, including a kiosk for refreshments and public conveniences. A full time officer based in the park will support volunteers and the Friends Group in providing community activities.

The design and location of Howard Park are of particular historic importance as they capture and illustrate the desire of the Garden City planners to include natural landscapes in the heart of new urban developments.

The park is named after the social reformer Ebenezer Howard, who was a major force behind the park's construction. It was opened in 1911 as part of the world's first garden city, fulfilling the ethos of a planned, self-contained, community surrounded by green belts, containing balanced areas of residences, industry and agriculture.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "This is wonderful news for visitors to, and everyone involved in Howard Park and Gardens. This shared greenspace was a central part of the thinking behind the Garden City and for nearly a century has been at the heart community life. This award will mean the park is restored and given a fresh lease of life so that the people of Letchworth can enjoy the park in years to come."

Sara Betsworth, the Big Lottery Fund's Head of Region for the East of England, added: "We are delighted to fund the regeneration and conservation of this much-loved green space. The project will provide more events and facilities for residents and visitors alike, enabling them to get involved with their local community, as well as protecting it for the enjoyment of future generations."

Councillor Ian Knighton, Portfolio Holder for Leisure at North Hertfordshire District Council, said: "This is fantastic news for Letchworth Garden City and we are delighted that the Heritage Lottery and the Big Lottery Funds have recognised the value of this historic park and its tremendous community value. As one of the first examples of urban landscaping, Howard Park and Gardens have undergone many changes over the years and now we have the chance to bring them into the 21st century, while still respecting their heritage.

"The success is a tribute to the efforts of local residents who place a high value on the park and gardens and whose ideas helped to shape the development of the scheme."

This award has been made as part of a massive windfall of over £18million has been given to six of the UK's much-loved public parks by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG)*.

This cash injection brings the total invested in public parks by the two lottery good causes to well over £1billion** - an amazing feat and to be celebrated in this - the National Lottery's 15th year.

Chris Packham, environmentalist and broadcaster, said: "We're so lucky in the UK to have such wonderful parks which not only offer massive benefits in terms of health, quality of life and well-being, but also brilliant opportunities to get close to nature and escape the stresses of everyday life. We should all celebrate this fantastic £18m investment from HLF and BIG. They understand that every community deserves to be near a great park!"

Notes to editors

* The 6 parks receiving a share of £18million, thanks to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG), are

• Spinney Hill Park, Leicester - £2,578,000
• Stewart Park, Middlesbrough - £4,337,000
• St James' Park, Southampton - £1,102,000
• Howard Park and Gardens, Letchworth Garden City - £1,841,000
• Stamford Park, Tameside - £3,995,000
• Queens Park, Bolton - £4,286,000

** Parks for People: The two Lottery Funds have been working together in partnership on Parks for People, a joint £150million grants programme over three years to 2009 for public parks. The Big Lottery Fund is investing £80 million (in England only) and £70million is coming from HLF (across the UK). This joint programme continues to support projects currently underway, but is closed to new applications. However, HLF continues to fund new parks projects to the tune of £20million a year.

People love parks
Between four and five billion visits are made to parks each year and 50% of the population visit a park at least once a week.

Surveys at HLF-funded parks have revealed:
• 95% of visits are enjoyable, peaceful and relaxing
• 60% of visitors take more physical exercise because they use parks
• 80% say the park helps make their area more attractive and a better place to live

HLF's funding for historic parks:

HLF has invested over £525 million in conserving more than 500 historic public parks across the UK

This investment includes work to no less than 84 bandstands, 100 visitor centres, 120 lakes and ponds and 141 playgrounds and play facilities for young people.

This investment has created hundreds of new jobs and training opportunities which address the skills shortage in the management of green spaces.

BIG's investment in our environment:

A further £80 million is being invested into public parks by BIG in partnership with HLF.

BIG has invested more than £700million in wider environmental initiatives.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK.

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) rolls out close to £2million in Lottery good cause money every 24 hours, which together with other Lottery distributors means that across the UK most people are within a few miles of a Lottery-funded project. BIG, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Out of every pound spent on a National Lottery ticket, 28p goes directly to good causes. BIG is responsible for distributing half of the money to improve communities and the lives of people most in need. HLF distributes 16.67% of the money to heritage projects across the UK. www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk

‘Postcards from the Park’ is an annual photographic competition run by HLF, BIG and parks charity GreenSpace. The competition attracts thousands of entries from across the UK celebrating the very essence of why so many people value their local park.