Letchworth's Howard Gardens public opening

28/10/2011

The original Sappho statue was stolen from the Gardens in the 1990s and a new version will now be given pride of place in the heart of the renovated Gardens.

The reopening of the Gardens marks a significant milestone in North Hertfordshire District Council's £2.7million project to renovate both Howard Park and Gardens. The overall scheme will conserve the historic importance of the Park and Gardens while bringing its facilities up-to-date and aims to increase the number of people who use and enjoy it. The scheme has been largely financed thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) joint Parks for People programme.

Unveiling Sappho is just part of the celebration to mark the garden's official launch. There will also be an official ceremony to bury a time capsule in the gardens. The capsule will contain information and pictures about the garden's history together with details about how they are used today. The information will be buried along with entries from local groups and users of the park and a summary of the renovation works showing before and after photos. Local newspapers, the Comet and the Advertiser, have also been invited to enter their front pages into the time capsule to provide a snapshot of the opening week.

Another time capsule is due to be buried near to the children's play area in the adjoining Park, where the refurbishment work is expected to be completed by Spring of 2012.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said on behalf of HLF and BIG: "We at HLF & BIG are delighted to have supported the restoration of Howard Gardens. This green space was a central part of the thinking behind the Garden City and for nearly a century has been at the heart of community life. All the activities at the opening event capture the spirit of Parks for People, offering everyone the chance to take part in this exciting occasion."

Councillor Ian Knighton, North Hertfordshire District Council's portfolio holder for Leisure said: "Howard Gardens is an important and historic feature of Letchworth Garden City and it plays a vital role in the community. The re-opening marks a significant milestone in the overall project to renovate the much loved Park and Gardens. We hope that the public will come along to this exciting event and we look forward to welcoming people on the day."

At the opening event the public are invited to take their first look at some of the new features of the gardens which include new pathways, a terrace area, fencing around the bowling green, seating, and a bridge linking the Gardens with Rushby Mead. New planting now includes a wetland habitat, wild flower area and hedge, tree and flower borders.

Other activities taking place on the day include an open day at Howard Gardens Social Centre, where there will be stalls with refreshments and items for sale. NHDC's Play Rangers Team will be attending the event providing plenty of fun activities and crafts for children. In addition there will be live music, poetry and entertainment for the whole family to enjoy.

Notes to editors

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 from 2006 to deliver a multi-million pound investment in public parks of £150m. Over the period 2006-9, the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) invested £80m (in England only) with £70m coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the UK.

Further information

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