

Today the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund announced £34.5million of investment in 13 parks across the UK. This new funding follows the publication of the HLF's recent report (26 June) which revealed the UK's public parks are at serious risk of decline unless innovative new ways of funding and maintaining them are found.

Alongside restoration of important historic features including bandstands and gatehouses, and the installation of new community facilities including a skateboard park and children's play areas, this funding will also deliver a range of activities designed to help these parks to be more sustainable. Projects receiving funding today include new cafes and skills training for volunteers and friends groups.

Two decades of public and Lottery investment has ensured that the majority of UK parks are in better condition. However, the State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to Risk? Report has revealed they are now at serious risk of rapid decline and even being sold off and lost to the public forever.

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said on behalf of HLF and the Big Lottery Fund: "Our report revealed how valued public parks are by people and communities and how essential they are to our physical and emotional well-being. That's why HLF and the BIG Lottery Fund have invested over £700m in parks since 1996. But the report makes clear that our parks face an uncertain future and so it's exciting to see how this new investment is going some way towards helping find new ways of funding and maintaining them so they are still here to be enjoyed long into the future."

Minister for Communities Stephen Williams said: “It’s great to see the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund supporting local communities in this way and injecting £34.5m into 13 parks to help transform them. Parks bring people together and help breathe life into communities, providing opportunities and space for both reflection and physical activity. They are particularly important to people in town and city centres where many residents don't have their own gardens for relaxation and for their children to play.”

Avenue House, Finchley
Run by the Avenue House Trust, a grant of £2.1million will restore this Grade II listed landscape which was originally created for the ink magnate Henry Stephens by leading 'gardenesque' landscape designer, Robert Marnock. The gardens have suffered from under-investment for decades and this project will restore all of the principal features of the Marnock design including the terrace, pond, rockery and wet garden, Bothy Garden and the Water Tower. In addition, the Grade II listed stable block will be developed into a new café bistro, profits from which will go back into maintaining the newly refurbished park.

Hemel Water Gardens, Hemel Hempstead
To be delivered in partnership by Dacorum Borough Council and the Friends of Jellicoe Water Gardens, a £2.4m grant will see the transformation of The Water Gardens in Hemel Hempstead which is a Grade II registered landscape designed by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1957.

The vision is to return the Water Gardens to an outstanding green space and source of pride to local residents, removing it from English Heritage’s ‘At Risk’ register and dramatically improving biodiversity. A new programme of events and activities will ensure the garden remains popular with residents and tourists. The grant will fund skills training for Friends groups, volunteers, students and trainees so they can contribute to on-going maintenance and other tasks. The park will also continue to work with local businesses.

Moor Park, Preston
Moor Park is a Victorian park located to the north of the centre of Preston. Covering 40 hectares, it is Grade II* on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. This £1.7m grant will restore important heritage features including the grotto, bowling pavilions, changing pavilion and observatory. The original planting schemes will also be reinstated. New facilities will include a new skate park and new snack bar. This grant will also enable the park to develop new volunteering opportunities and skills training.

The 13 parks and cemeteries receiving Lottery funding today are:

HLF / Big Lottery Fund joint grants in England

- Victoria Park, Ilkeston £740,800
- Hemel Water Gardens, Hemel Hempstead £2,467,700
- Ampthill Park, Bedfordshire £606,800
- Cassiobury Park, Watford £4,534,900
- Avenue House, Finchley £2,154,700
- Gunnersbury Park, Ealing and Hounslow £4,671,000
- Moor Park, Preston £1,725,000
- Beckenham Place Park, Lewisham £4,908,400
- Beddington Park and Grange Sutton £3,203,900
- Northwood Cemetery Heritage Project, Isle of Wight £1,064,000
- Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens, Dover £3,389,400

- Pearson Park, Hull £2,343,600

HLF only funded grants

- Levengrove Park, Dumbarton £2,660,800

State of UK Public Parks on 26 June

HLF published *State of UK Public Parks 2014: Renaissance to risk?* – the first report to comprehensively review the condition and management of the UK's public parks. View the State of UK Public Parks report.

Dr ?Mike Clarke, CEO at RSPB, said: "Parks are living links in our networks of green spaces which are so important for nature in our towns and cities. And they are where we can get close to wildlife near home and every day – important for adults, eye-opening for children. And we know from research that a connection to nature benefits children in education, health and social skills. Imaginatively managed parks can help species like house sparrow which have suffered dramatic population declines. At their best, our parks can become home for wildlife and great places for people to enjoy bees, birds, butterflies and much more."

Key findings from the research:

Parks are under direct threat

- 86% of parks managers report cuts to revenue budgets since 2010, a trend they expect to continue over the next three years. This could mean: park facilities such as cafes and toilets are closed or opening hours reduced; grass left uncut, flower beds left empty, play areas less regularly cleaned and inspected and more anti-social behaviour due to less park staff

Parks are one of the most highly used public assets

- With 34million people estimated to make regular visits parks are one of the UK's most heavily used public services Trend towards greater community involvement

Trend towards greater community involvement

- In the past three years park managers have seen an increase of over 30% in the number of friends and park user groups and over half of expect this increase to continue

Finding new innovative ways to make the financing and management of parks sustainable is vital to ensuring their future. HLF and the Big Lottery Fund are working in partnership with the innovation charity Nesta on a Rethinking Parks programme. This is supporting organisations and partnerships to explore new approaches to generating income and managing parks. Shortly to be announced are grants totalling £1million that will enable a range of innovative park projects to be piloted.

Further information

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Victoria Park, Ilkeston



£2.1m to restore Finchley's Avenue House park



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ding for major restoration

Archive image of the Gothic revival Manor House at Kearsney Abbey



£3.1million of Lottery funding

Hemel Water Gardens



ery funding for major restoration

Levengrove Park



nt in Scottish parks to over £50million

Pearson Park secures Heritage Lottery Fund support