Official launch marks start of a new era for St Ann’s Allotments

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Many of those who have taken part in the project will be at the launch, including local people and volunteers, as well as representatives from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Nottingham City Council, who helped to fund the work, including Councillor Jon Collins, Leader of Nottingham City Council.

The new visitor centre will be open to the public from Monday 20 May between 10am and 4pm during the week and on selected Saturday mornings. Visitors will be welcome to go along to find out more about the 75 acre allotments, which are the oldest and largest area of Victorian detached town gardens in the UK, a Grade II* listed heritage site and a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

The visitor centre, which is at the Ransom Road entrance, will feature exciting interactive displays spanning the site’s beginning as rough grazing land for animals 600 years ago, through the elegant days of pleasure gardens in the 19th century, to the emergence of the allotment gardens we know today.

The centre will also host special events such as open days and talks by Mo Cooper, the site’s Heritage Officer, who is researching and archiving the amazing history of the allotments, as well as events for volunteers and allotment holders. The new centre already has lots of bookings from community groups.

During these events, visitors will be given a guided tour of the allotments and visit a range of historical display gardens too, including a 19th century detached town garden, a Second World War ‘Dig for Victory’ allotment, an early 20th century rose garden and an orchard.

Overall, the site is home to 670 individual allotment gardens, the vast majority of which are in use, as well as a community orchard and plant nursery, developed to propagate and protect the site’s rare historical plants. For example, there are over 140 species of apple tree at the allotments, and 40 types of pear tree.

Around 60 old allotment plots, which are unsuitable for gardening as they’re on sloping ground, have been turned into a haven for wildlife and the site will certainly be of interest to nature lovers as well as anyone with a passion for the area, local history, horticulture or allotment gardening.

Over 43 types of bird have been spotted at the site, including threatened species like the bullfinch, house sparrow, lesser-spotted woodpecker, marsh tit, starling, song thrush and willow tit, together with bats and insects, including the rare currant clearwing moth, which hasn’t been recorded in Nottingham for more than 40 years.

Mo says: “Visitors will be able to go back in time and discover the allotments through the eyes of the people who used them. Rich and poor, young and old, for pleasure or to grow food and make a living…the site has been used by people from all walks of life at different times in its history so it really is a window into the city’s vibrant past.”

The allotments are owned by Nottingham City Council and leased to Hungerhill Developments Ltd, which is part of the Renewal Trust, a regeneration charity based in St Ann’s and Sneinton. They are managed day-to-day by STAA Ltd.

Cherry Underwood, Trust Executive at the Renewal Trust says: “The centre and display gardens are the last major step in the journey to restore and revitalise St Ann’s Allotments so the launch represents a real milestone for all those involved. The site has so many fascinating stories to tell and I really think it’ll help to put Nottingham on the map – for history, heritage, nature and so much more. It’s a wonderful achievement and we’re looking forward to welcoming visitors from far and wide.”

The site currently employs 13 local people and has helped to boost regeneration in the area by giving people the chance to learn new skills and gain qualifications in horticulture for example.

Further information

To find out more about the history and heritage of the allotments, or for details of tours and forthcoming events, please call Mo Cooper on 0115 958 9255 or visit St Ann's Allotments website.