‘Hidden Gem’ Swiss Garden gets go ahead for £2.8m restoration

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The Swiss Garden is a rare survival of a Regency garden in the Picturesque style and is situated within Old Warden Park, an early 19th century landscape park to the west of Biggleswade in mid-Bedfordshire.

Created in the early 19th century, its first owner was Lord Robert Henley Ongley whose vision was for a Swiss parkland idyll in the rather unlikely setting of the low lying Bedfordshire countryside. In the 1870s the 9 acre garden was bought by the industrialist Joseph Shuttleworth who introduced Victorian ‘improvements’, while retaining the original layout of the Regency plan.

HLF’s grant will help the Garden’s owner, the Shuttleworth Trust, and its partner Central Bedfordshire Council, repair and conserve the Garden’s 13 listed buildings and ornamental structures including the Swiss Cottage, the Indian Kiosk, the Grotto and Fernery, ornate ironwork bridges and arches, stone animals and birds, marble memorial tablets and stone and metal urns.

The project will involve local residents in managing the Swiss Garden, and two horticultural apprenticeships and two built heritage apprenticeships will be offered. An important aim is to promote the Swiss Garden to a wide range of people so that more visitors, including school groups, can come and learn about this remarkable green oasis. Work on restoring the garden will begin in early 2013 and is expected to be completed by summer 2016.

Hugh Duberly CBE LL, Chairman of the Shuttleworth Trust, said: “We are thrilled and grateful that the Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised the opportunity that the Swiss Garden presents as a unique and fascinating Regency garden in the middle of Bedfordshire, lying close to the urban centres of Stevenage, Luton, Milton Keynes and Northampton. We look forward to welcoming many more people to the garden as the restoration work progresses and we’re confident that they will be delighted with its originality and beauty.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: “The Swiss Garden, previously something of a hidden gem, is now on the road to becoming much better known and appreciated. We’re pleased to be supporting plans to restore a number of its wonderfully distinctive features as well as providing much-needed learning and volunteering programmes and four apprenticeships.”

Notes to editors

The Shuttleworth Trust was created in 1940 by Dorothy Shuttleworth in memory of her son Richard who was killed in a flying accident, aged 31. As well as the Swiss Garden, the trust is custodian of the Shuttleworth Collection of historic aircraft. Old Warden Park is also home to the Bird of Prey centre and Shuttleworth College which specialises in land and environment courses.

Further information

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