Westonbirt Arboretum awarded £1.9 million by Heritage Lottery Fund

19/11/2012

The grant means phase one of the Westonbirt Project – a development plan which includes restoration of the Grade I registered landscape and the construction of a new welcome building and car park – can begin in 2013.

Simon Toomer, Arboretum Director, commented: “This is a great step forward in realising our ambitious plans to raise the level of the arboretum’s visitor and learning facilities to match that of its world class tree collection.

“This award will go a long way to help make Westonbirt a place where all visitors can enjoy and learn so much more about the arboretum and its trees.”

Richard Bellamy, Head of HLF South West, said: “Westonbirt has been looking spectacular thanks to the autumn colours which attracted huge numbers of visitors this year. We were really impressed with the Forestry Commission’s vision regarding conserving key parts of this wonderful landscape and also making much-needed improvements to visitor facilities. Plans for a volunteer programme – Westonbirt’s very own ‘Gamesmakers’ – will also make a huge difference to both conservation and education work on site.”

Chris Packham, environmentalist and presenter, said: “This announcement is particularly heart-warming set amongst the awful backdrop of news of our endangered trees. Westonbirt is truly magical so I’m chuffed to hear this news! I can’t stress enough the importance of this particular arboretum – it’s the natural world’s equivalent of an outdoor museum and gives us a much greater understanding of the variety and value of trees. The Heritage Lottery Fund has a fantastic track record for supporting the UK’s landscapes and wildlife and this investment of nearly £2m will delight the many of us who are passionate about trees and the environment.”

Construction of the new car park will begin in the New Year. The car park will be followed by construction of the welcome building in the summer of 2013.

Inside the welcome building, visitors will find up-to-date information about what is happening around the arboretum – from family activities and free guided walks to information about the tree collection.

Once the welcome building is completed, the site of the current car park, which is located on Grade I registered land, will be restored to wildflower-rich grassland.

The HLF funding will also allow the arboretum to engage with wider communities through new projects and more resources. Projects with community groups at risk from social exclusion are planned as part of this work.

The awarding of HLF funding will also allow the arboretum to look ahead to later phases of the Westonbirt Project, which include a tree walkway and a tree management centre.

Notes to editors

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum is managed by the Forestry Commission and is renowned worldwide for its tree and shrub collection. Home to five national collections, the arboretum covers 243 hectares (600 acres) and contains

16,000 labelled specimens. Visitor numbers are 350,000 a year, with a membership of over 28,000. Westonbirt Arboretum was established in the 1850s by wealthy landowner Robert Holford and later developed by his son George Holford. Unlike many arboretums, Westonbirt is laid out according to aesthetic appeal rather than scientific or geographical criteria.

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment. Forestry Commission website

The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum was formed in 1985. The charity's objects are to support The National Arboretum in promoting public understanding of the crucial role of trees to the environment and society. It is funded by membership receipts from over 28,000 members, other fundraising, and the use of the Great Oak Hall for events and activities. The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum website

The fundraising campaign for phase one of the Westonbirt Project has been led by the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum. Phase one of the project aims to improve the visitor arrival and experience by building a new Welcome Building, relocating the car park and restoring the Grade I Registered landscape. Work on Phase One is planned to start in 2013. To find our more go to the Westonbirt Project page.

Further information

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