

Agenda Item:

Report to: Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Services

Date: 17th March 2008

Report from: Head of Resort Services and Amenities

Title of report: **ST. LEONARDS GARDENS HERITAGE LOTTERY FUNDED RESTORATION PROJECT – MEMBERS’ UPDATE**

Purpose of report: To update Members on progress towards the physical restoration of the gardens, restoration of the South Lodge and ongoing community development project.

- Recommendations:**
- 1. That Members note the progress of the project and ongoing community development activity.**
 - 2. Note that Burton’s St. Leonards Society is now in occupation of the West Lodge and setting up an exhibition on the ground floor. The Society will provide a range of linked activities, including staffing the Lodge and providing a series of interpretive walks.**
 - 3. Note that an opening event will take place on 21st June 2008, celebrating the restoration and promoting the future use of the gardens.**
 - 4. To acknowledge and thank all those who contributed; especially the Heritage Lottery Fund, who made the project possible.**
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1.0 Historic Background

- 1.1 James Burton started work on his vision for St. Leonards in 1828, with the laying of the foundation stone of the St. Leonards Hotel. In the early 1830's the gardens were laid out. The gardens were to follow the contours of the natural valley, allowing spectacular views for the newly constructed villas. Although the gardens were originally "subscription" gardens, by the 1870's they had declined and the Council then purchased them. Over the years, the gardens have seen many changes and improvements, but by the 1990's began to look tired and were under-used.
- 1.2 In 2004 the Council made an application for phase 1 funding to develop the project and put in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £1m towards the overall project cost of £1,150,000. This was successful and in 2006 the physical restoration of the gardens and the South Lodge commenced. The project was completed in autumn 2007, to budget and on time.

2.0 Regeneration of St. Leonards

- 2.1 The gardens are seen as an integral part of the regeneration initiatives for St. Leonards, providing local communities with better quality open space and enhancing their understanding of the heritage of the area in which they live.
- 2.2 It is envisaged that through promotion of the gardens within the context of Burton's St. Leonards and the opening of the lodge, that the area will increasingly be seen as a visitor attraction. Better connection with the Seafront, Marina Pavilion and the Royal Victoria Hotel, will enable the injection of much needed new life into the area.

3.0 Strategic Context – (Parks and Open Spaces Strategy)

- 3.1 St Leonards Gardens had been somewhat "tired" and scored 52 for quality (benchmark 60) in the Open Spaces audit. A re-audit to be carried out shortly will undoubtedly demonstrate the site to have exceeded the Council's quality standard, which will contribute significantly to Community Strategy Target 20.
- 3.2 The gardens have been entered for the Green Flag Award 2008 and the Green Heritage Award, making it the third open space within the Borough being entered for this year (the others are Alexandra Park and Hastings Country Park).

4.0 The "Works" – current position

- 4.1 The site works have now reached practical completion. The contractor is presently undertaking maintenance works to the newly planted shrub areas of the gardens. They are also maintaining the newly seeded southern lawn - at present fenced but due to be opened for access by Easter. A snagging list of outstanding

minor works has just been agreed and the contractor is rectifying these. The only item of outstanding works is the replacement of the bollard in the South Lodge arch, and the replacement of two external doors of East Lodge. The replacement of these doors was supplementary to the original planning consent, and one of the doors will be DDA compliant allowing full access to the ground floor. It is anticipated the doors will be replaced in time for the opening of the Lodge at Easter. The ground floor also incorporates a fully accessible toilet.

5.0 Project Closure with Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

- 5.1 Steps will be taken to close the project with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which includes a final report, completed management plan and final drawdown of funds. The original grant award was given based on conditions, which we have largely met. HLF require commitment from the owner of the restored site that it will be managed in accordance with the agreed management plan and that it is resourced adequately such that it is sustained in at least its restored condition. A further requirement is that a head gardener be appointed who will take a specific interest in the management of the site. Quadron has now appointed an experienced gardener to this role. It is anticipated that the contract with HLF will be completed by the spring.

6.0 Community Development

- 6.1 The community development officer, Jane Dodson, started 24 September 2007 for a period of 18 months. The first Friends of St Leonards Gardens meeting held on 26th January 2008 was well attended, following a workshop with Burtons' St Leonards Society to explore project ideas. A volunteer has come forward to lead the group and stand for election as chair. Since then sub groups have been formed on local history, community arts, and wildlife. Proposals are under development for some sort of functional sculpture with a sound installation (grant to be applied for by Tempo Arts), and for bird, bat and bee boxes plus a possible floating island in the pond to provide cover and nesting material - to be developed by Hastings Recycled wood social enterprise, working with long-term job seekers.
- 6.2 A drop-in session for those wanting to volunteer in the Lodge took place on 10th March at 2 - 4.30pm and the Lodge itself is due to open to the public at Easter. The formal opening of the Gardens will take place 21 June 08, and an Arts Council England application has been submitted to match HBC funding for this, with a decision due in April. A marketing sub group meets regularly to review the plans for the opening and take account of community ideas for the family fun day, including an open-air play/film screening, children's activities and guided walks. The next full Friends meeting will be held at the South Lodge 10th April 2 - 4pm with a chance to view the display, and hear feedback from all the sub groups, review the proposals and formally agree priorities.

7.0 Interpretation

- 7.1 The Burton's St Leonards Society is currently working on a temporary display in West Lodge to be ready for the formal re-opening of the Gardens. This will be

based largely on archive material currently held at the Museum. A Heritage Lottery Fund officer has been on site to advise on the forthcoming application for new interpretative facilities, which will be submitted as soon as quotations have been received for security, light control and audio visual elements of the project.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 A key issue for Heritage Lottery funded projects is that sites should continue to develop and are sustained. To this end, a management plan has been developed to first draft stage. It is estimated that the increased revenue commitment needed to support the plan is in the region of £10k per year. This is provided for through the original grant award for the next 10 years.

9.0 Acknowledgements

9.1 The success of this project owes much to the main contractors, English Landscapes; project management by Wealden Architectural Services and Council officers.

9.2 A special thanks should be extended to the Heritage Lottery Fund, without whom the project would not have been possible.

Appendices None

Background Documents None

Policy implications

Equalities & Community Cohesiveness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental issues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Economic / Financial implications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Human Rights Act	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational Consequences	<input type="checkbox"/>

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