

Antrim Castle Gardens



Local Gem To National Treasure

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Introduction

The transformation of Antrim Castle Gardens from a much loved local gem to national treasure and visitor attraction of regional significance is a story of passion and pride. Transformational change has been achieved by people who had a pride in their place and with their passion, enthusiasm, talent and effective partnership working have turned Antrim Castle Gardens, a local gem into a national treasure.



A Local Gem

“This was the place my Grandparents brought me to play as a child, they lived just across the road. Even then it was a special place, the ruins of the castle were ghostly, the ancient motte a challenge to climb, the site of the annual agricultural show where my grandfather was renowned for his bantams and a place where hockey was the king of sports. The history of Antrim and its people is as much the history of this place, its battles and personalities.

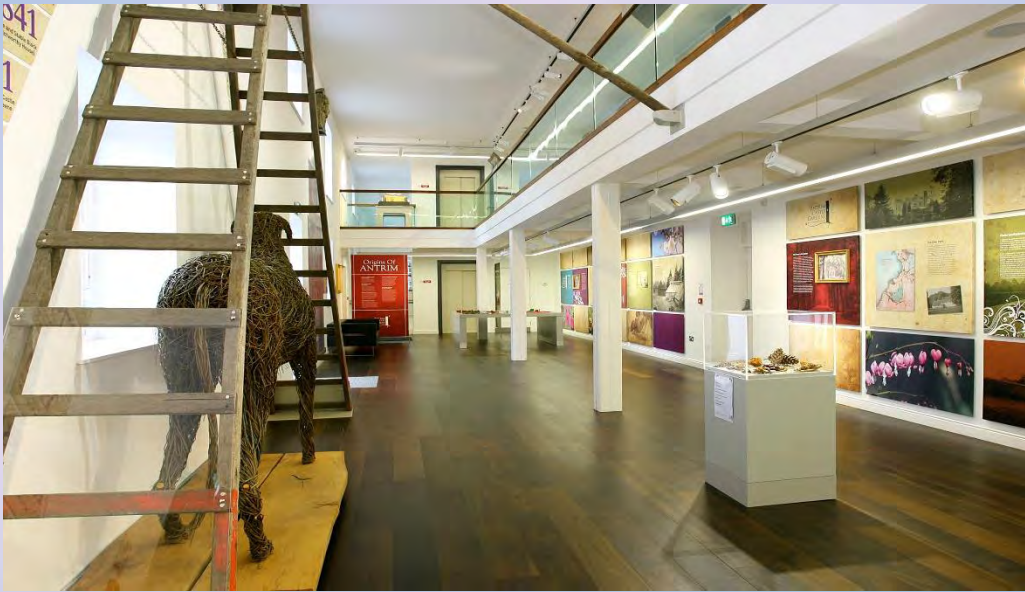
It’s not just that it sits at the heart of Antrim, it is the heart of Antrim.

And when the gardens grew tired Council, Heritage Lottery and many others stepped in to revitalise them, to breathe new life into them and bring a new generation to enjoy and value its place in our community. Staff and volunteers go far beyond mere duty to maintain and care for the Castle Gardens.

*I have watched opera in the ruins of the old castle, old rockers jamming in the studio, summer concerts in the formal gardens, children learning to ride their bikes, dogs chasing balls, families having picnics and brides coming straight from their wedding ceremonies to get the photos they want for their albums. The gardens mean all of this to me and more. In a mad world the gardens are my sanctuary, they are the place to **restore my soul.**”*

Stephen Nichol, Antrim Resident





A Transformation Tale

- A Potted History
- Background
- Restoration to Rebirth
- Corporate Context
- Aims and Objectives
- Achievements Vs Objectives
- A Sense of Pride
- The Future

A Potted History

- Historical Significance
 - Gardens created between 1665 – 1714
 - Most significant historic Garden in public ownership in NI
- Council Ownership
 - Phased acquisition from 1963 - 1991
- Council Vision



A Potted History

- HLF
 - £6 million capital spend
 - 60% externally funded
- Capital Project
 - Work began in 2009



Background

- Problems
- Anti Social Behaviour
Vandalism
- Usage Levels & Low
Awareness
- Lack of Partnership
- Limited Tourism Offer
- Risk of Deterioration



Restoration to Rebirth

Three Phases of Transformation

- 2009 to 2012 Restoration Project & Capital Works
 - Challenges Faced
- 2012 to 2015 Reopening
 - New Challenges
 - Potential Realised
- 2015 to Date RPA
 - Challenge of Change
 - Accelerated Success

Corporate Context



- Place
- People
- Prosperity
- Performance

Aims and Objectives

- Improve, promote and enhance the cultural and natural heritage of the Gardens and benchmark our performance through accreditation and awards schemes.
- Fully develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to protect, improve and promote natural heritage and address issues of anti-social behavior.
- Develop ACG as a quality visitor attraction of regional significance with a vibrant programme of events, ensuring it contributes to the economic prosperity of the Borough

Achievements Vs Objectives

Improve, promote and enhance the cultural and natural heritage of the Gardens and benchmark our performance through accreditation and awards schemes.



Achievements Vs Objectives

- 2018 TNI Awards Highly Commended
- APSE Service Awards
- Fields In Trust Best NI Park
- NILGA – Best Team & Employee of the Year
- CIPRNI – Best Event
- Trip Adviser
- Top 5 NI Visitor Attractions
- Green Flag & Green Heritage Award



Achievements Vs Objectives

- Sustainable Ireland – Biodiversity Project of the Year - Gold Winner
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) - NI Tourism & Leisure Building Project of the Year Winner
- Federation of Passenger Transport NI – Coach Friendly Award Winner
- LNP Lough Neagh Awards
- Translink Ulster in Bloom - Outstanding Floral Presentation

Achievements Vs Objectives

Fully develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to protect, improve and promote natural heritage and address issues of anti-social behaviour.



Achievements Vs Objectives

Partnerships

- Internal and External
- Mutually Beneficial
- Value added
- Shared Vision

Stakeholder Success

Essential Support



Achievements Vs Objectives

Develop ACG as a quality visitor attraction of regional significance with a vibrant programme of events, ensuring it contributes to the economic prosperity of the Borough.



Achievements Vs Objectives

- *Large Scale Events*

Party in the Park

Enchanted Winter Garden

Garden Show Ireland

Ulster Pipe Band Championships

Weekly Park Run

Opera in the Gardens

Summer Music and Festivals

Charitable and Private Events

- *Special Events*

Armed Forces Day

Circuit of Ireland Rally

River 2 Lough Festival

Queens Royal Gun Salute



- **Established as one of NI's Leading Visitor Attractions 464K annually**
- By Royal Appointment
- Economic Return



Enchanted Winter Garden



A Sense of Pride

- Civic Pride
- Cross Cutting Service Delivery
- Ownership
- Community Connections
- Communication and Consultation
- Stakeholder Role
- Celebrating Success
- Caring for Our Asset



Securing The Future

- Retention of the Green Flag & Heritage Green Flag Award
- Increased number of visitors annually to exceed 500,000
- To win Best NI Park Award and challenge for Best UK Park
- To attract new large scale events to the Gardens as a host venue.
- To expand The Enchanted Winter Garden event and increase numbers attending to 70,000
- **A minimum 4 Star visitor attraction accreditation in Tourism NI's Visitor Attraction Grading Scheme**
- Develop the visitor offer with new features such as fairy trail
- Identify and Develop Income Streams and programming
- To continue horticultural developments throughout the gardens with a focus on indigenous plant species.
- To connect with the Town and act as a driver for regeneration
- Contribute to the Economic Prosperity of the Borough

A National Treasure

The Gardens will continue to play their role in ensuring visitors from all over Northern Ireland and beyond flock to the Borough and help the Council create a **“Prosperous Place, Inspired by Our People and Driven by Ambition”**



Questions?

