Background

The Chiswick House and Gardens Trust was established as a Charity in 2005 through a joint initiative between the London Borough of Hounslow and English Heritage. The intention was to reverse the decline in the historic property and public amenity and provide holistic long term governance for the site.

The Trust's Charitable Object states it is to advance education by the preservation, restoration, maintenance, repair and enhancement of Chiswick House and Gardens and its contents, for the benefit of the public and of the historical and architectural heritage of England.

Following a successful application by the partners to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2007 the Trust oversaw the restoration of the historic gardens, subsequently assuming management responsibility for the public park in April 2010 and for which undertaking the council makes an annual contribution to the Trust, commensurate with its former level of expenditure at Chiswick.

The Trust’s key aims as stated within the HLF application are to:

- Respond primarily to the needs of the site and its stakeholders and visitors
- Provide a higher standard of care, where the Grounds are ‘gardened’ rather than merely maintained
• Promote the relevance of the House and Gardens to the broadest possible audience and offer increased opportunities for enjoyment learning, volunteering and training.
• Offer an operationally and financially leaner management approach, focused on the site
• Undertake concentrated fundraising for the site and generate additional income from the site which is ploughed back into the House and Gardens Sections 2.2.4 and 4.4.1 of the Stage 2 Business Plan

It was anticipated the Trust would assume a 99 year lease of the gardens on completion of the restoration project in 2010 and operate the House through a management agreement with English Heritage.

Progress to Date

➢ Management & Governance: We have established a well qualified and highly motivated site based staff team dedicated to the care of the site and its users and continued the development of an exceptionally skilled Board of Trustees. Recent recruits to the board are:

1) Jane Kennedy, a conservation architect who was Surveyor to the Fabric of Ely Cathedral and oversaw a period of major restoration there. She was also instrumental in the refurbishment of Kew Palace and the restoration of Stowe House.
2) Terence Kyle, a long term local resident and formerly Managing Partner at Linklaters, the international law firm. He previously played a large part in raising and directing funding for the cricket facilities at Chiswick House.
3) Juliet West, formerly in the Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings in the Department of the Environment and then English Heritage where she focused on the care and preservation of major London properties including Chiswick House which she has been involved with for over 30 years.

➢ Volunteers: The Trust has developed a now 160 strong local Volunteer Service undertaking a wide variety of roles including gardening, providing public tours in the House and Gardens, Conservation Management, Volunteer Wardening, education and event assistance and maintaining the Archives. Volunteers collectively donated 923 full days work to the Trust from April 1st to end October 2012 alone. In addition local professionals provide valuable pro-bono support including legal, financial, PR and market research.

➢ Warden Service: The introduction of the Chiswick House Warden Service drawn from military backgrounds in June 2010 has had a transforming effect on the operation of the park in terms of reducing vandalism and crime, reducing anti-social behaviour and increasing people’s sense of personal safety in the gardens. Engagement and co-operation with the police (who have written to commend the service), council service providers and with park users and the wider local community has extended the resources available to the gardens and provided an exemplar for other public parks. Anecdotal evidence, customer comments and user surveys show many people who previously avoided the park have become regular users and the park is now
perceived to be a safe place to visit. The Trust was awarded The Mayor of London’s Safer Park’s Award in the top Gold Category in 2011 and 2012.

- **The Kitchen Garden Project** has developed and expanded since 2010 with over 10,000 people benefiting either directly as regular volunteers or as visitors engaging in the project. 2,000 children from 15 different schools have participated in our free community garden school sessions and there are 50 regular volunteers. We have accepted 6 people on 30 hour work placements (gaining NVQ Level 2). Not only does the project involve and educate a wide range of people of all ages in growing food and associated healthy living benefits, but it provides a valuable social wellbeing and therapeutic resource which is precious to those involved, and has a real impact on peoples lives whether for example they are special needs students, those referred from health organisations or others seeking skills and help with re-entry into employment.

- **Re-instating Horticulture**: We have brought horticulture back to the gardens, in particular the regeneration of the Italian Garden and Camellia Shrubbery. This has been possible due to the considerable efforts of our volunteers led by the garden team and the careful direction of the grounds maintenance contract.

- **Building Renovations**: The HLF project put the majority of the garden structures in good order but not all buildings were addressed. The Trust has undertaken much needed renovations and improvements to the two tenanted residential properties for which we are responsible within the gardens (North Lodge and the Cricket Pavilion Flat), redecorated the Cricket Pavilion and provided a new electronic score board and new railings. We have restored the broken statue of ‘Ishmael in the Wilderness’ with financial support from Chiswick House Friends (2011) and conserved the ‘Bathing Nymph’ by RJ Wyatt (2012). Both statues can now be seen in the Conservatory where they had been displayed by the council prior to the building falling into disrepair. We are currently repairing a section of the tennis court wall which was demolished by a falling tree earlier this year.

- **The Car Park** pay and display has been in operation since December 3rd 2012 ensuring that spaces are available for visitors to this property and also to Hogarth House. This took several years to achieve and the Trust is grateful to the Chiswick Area Forum for their role in making it happen.

- **Annual Events Programme**: There is a vibrant and well supported annual events programme from walks and talks to children’s outdoor theatre, concerts including the Royal Philharmonic 2012, garden fairs and Open Air Film.

- **The Olympics and Queen’s Jubilee** provided a special platform for celebratory events at Chiswick. The first was a Cultural Olympiad installation ‘Meadow Flowers’ in the Ionic Temple garden by ceramic artist Paul Cummins. Other venues included Parliament, Althorp and Castle Howard. This was followed by the magnificent ‘Queens Beasts’, celebrating Her Majesty the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee. In July we were honoured to be chosen by the borough to host a visit by HRH Duke of Kent to mark the planting of a jubilee Black Poplar tree and used this opportunity to promote our partnership with the Council and to applaud the Volunteer Service.
- **New National Festival:** In 2011 we launched the Chiswick House Camellia Festival attracting around 5,000 visitors from all over the country – a new event in the national gardening calendar. Sir Peter Blake launched the 2012 festival which once again received excellent national publicity including coverage on BBC Gardeners World. The 2013 Festival also marks the 200th anniversary of the building of the Conservatory and will be celebrated in a special exhibition.

- **Financial Sustainability:** The Trust is financially viable and has developed a business model which is successful to date. The hospitality (mostly wedding) business provides a key income stream along with the café franchise, a growing film location business (clients in 2012 include Disney, Aston Martin, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Horrible Histories and Aquascutum) and our own fundraising activities. Our aim is to provide an income stream whilst respecting the heritage of the gardens, the natural environment and the enjoyment of park users. It was intended that a shop be provided as part of the HLF project to support revenue generation – this did not happen due to various constraints, but something we still need to pursue.

- **Fundraising:** The Trust has been successful in attracting funds since the HLF project, most notably through an uplift to that grant of £200k to fund key staff positions over 3 years; to the Historic & Botanic Gardens Bursary Scheme for funding a trainee gardener; additional Local Food Fund grants to the Kitchen Garden Project; targeted donations by Chiswick House Friends and the House Festival. The House Festival raised a marvellous £375,000 over 5 years and attracted many thousands of followers. Its focus was particularly the garden restoration and with the main works complete it is re-locating to Marble Hill House with continuing generous support for English Heritage.

- **Trust Status Exemplar:** Chiswick House and Gardens Trust is increasingly held up as an exemplar, particularly in the London region. The Trust Director (TD) was a guest speaker alongside Hamish Pringle, (formerly Director of Heritage & Leisure LBH) at an HLF sponsored seminar in June looking into charitable trust’s managing parks. The TD was also guest speaker at Crystal Palace Park Conference in October 2012 and has provided advice to Pitzhanger Manor, the Environment Trust for Richmond and Ealing Council. We hosted a seminar on park security for the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum in December 2012 and are due to provide advice on fundraising to Fulham Palace in the New Year.

**Projects in the Pipe-Line**

The Trust is committed to ongoing improvements and we are working on projects to renovate the Stavely Road end of the gardens including the refurbishment of Stavely Road loos and reinstatement of Lord Burlington’s loop path; improve the quality of the Western Lawn and with financial support from Chiswick House Friends, restore a historic glass house behind the Conservatory for propagation and volunteer use.

We hope that a final outstanding element of the HLF project works delivered by English Heritage – to improve the water management system within the lake – will be completed in 2013.
Partnership with London Borough of Hounslow

The Trust operates independently as envisaged but we value our close relationship with London Borough of Hounslow and our place in the community. We actively look for opportunities where we might contribute to the council’s wider strategic aims and welcome suggestions and ways of promoting our joint endeavour.

Sarah Finch Crisp, Trust Director 20.12.12