Glastonbury Abbey reopens thanks to emergency



After closing completely due to the coronavirus pandemic, Glastonbury Abbey has been able to reopen safely thanks to National Lottery emergency funding.

Glastonbury Abbey, said to be the resting place of the legendary King Arthur, is a fascinating part of the UK's heritage attracting visitors from around the world.

The ancient site has some incredible stories to tell – from wealth and fires to myths and legends. Today it has a museum, costumed tours, café and 36 acres of beautiful grounds.

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>
> *Janet Bell, Director of Glastonbury Abbey*

The impact of coronavirus

When the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and lockdown hit, the whole site closed.

Janet Bell, Director of Glastonbury Abbey, said: “The pandemic and lockdown had a massive impact. In a normal year 50% of our visitors are international so we had early warning signs in February when almost all our European groups cancelled their visits. Then lockdown occurred just as our main visitor season was about to begin and of course we had to close completely, losing all our income.”

It also meant that at a time when access to outdoor space for exercise and wellbeing was ever more important, the main outdoor space in the centre of Glastonbury was off-limits.



National Lottery funding has helped keep the ruins and grounds safe.

Emergency funding lifeline

Glastonbury Abbey successfully applied to the Heritage Emergency Fund, securing £217,500 to help it survive.

The National Lottery funding enabled essential maintenance of the ruins and grounds to continue, keeping them safe and accessible in anticipation of visitors returning. It also meant staff could be kept on and vital expertise was not lost.

The emergency funding has helped support the site to reopen safely to visitors, covering essential costs such as portable toilets, PPE and safety screens.

Some aspects, such as museum interactives and the costumed tours remain closed, but visitors are returning.

Janet said: “We opened the grounds in June and people were so pleased to be able to have this space to get out, walk and feel safe. As restrictions have eased we have opened some of the buildings, with reduced opening hours. People have generally been very supportive and just appreciate that we have managed to reopen.”



Glastonbury Abbey attracts visitors from around the world.

The future for Glastonbury Abbey

Janet said: “We face a very hard winter financially until the next main season at least and it will take a long time to recover. We want to keep sharing Glastonbury Abbey’s incredible stories as far as we can and we are looking at improving our digital engagement and adapting to accommodate group visitors.

“But at least we are open – National Lottery support was such a relief.”



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