£4.8million funding boost to revive Folkestone Leas



The water balance cliff lift provides step-free access from the Leas to the seafront and Lower Coastal Park. Photo: Chris Gorman.

The rare surviving water lift, a remarkable example of Victorian engineering, will be returned to its original use connecting seafront and town.

The Grade II* listed Leas Lift funicular in Folkestone, Kent, is one of only three water-balanced lifts to survive in the UK, and will be restored thanks to National Lottery players.

Hugely popular in the Victorian era, the lift has operated almost continuously for over 130 years. It closed only occasionally for repairs and during the Second World War.

The lift was closed in 2016 due to safety fears and was placed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register in 2018.

> We can't wait to welcome passengers back 140 years after it was first installed.
>
> *Cathy Beare, Chair of the Folkestone Leas Lift Company Charity*

Community pride in local heritage

To save the lift from further deterioration and ensure its future use by the community, a group of volunteers came together to launch a fundraising campaign.

With the additional £4.8m National Lottery grant, the overall fundraising target of £6.6m has been reached, meaning plans which will see the lift re-open in 2025 can go ahead.

> Two people stand holding a large ticket saying 'we have lift off' and bearing the Heritage Fund logo
>
> Cathy Beare and James Walker-Osborn, trustees of the Folkestone Leas Lift Company Charity, celebrate the funding boost that means the project can start. Photo: Chris Gorman.

Uplifting news

Cathy Beare, Chair of the Folkestone Leas Lift Company Charity, said: “This is a huge win for us. As a team, we have come a long way and I am very proud to chair a dedicated and passionate board of volunteer trustees that have brought the concept of operating Folkestone’s rare heritage water balance lift closer to reality.

“We can’t wait to welcome passengers back 140 years after it was first installed. People tell me the hard work starts now, although it certainly feels like we are well on the road to success.”

Alongside preserving the historic lift, the project will create an event and community hub on the site. Visitor facilities, such as the waiting room and ticket office, will be refurbished, and a new glass window will be installed so that visitors can peek inside the pump room to see its machinery and equipment.

Victorian engineering fit for the 21st century

The lift’s operating system uses water and gravity and is controlled from a small cabin at the top of the cliff.

It has carried more than 36.4million people since it opened in 1885, in a process that is especially energy efficient. The lift has a very small carbon footprint, as it emits no pollution and recycles all the water used to drive the cars.

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The Union Chain Bridge reopens to traffic following major restoration project. Credit: Northumberland County Council



d reopens

Visitors turning Bourn Windmill. Photo: Cambridgeshire ACRE



he UK’s oldest windmill reopens

Royal Observatory Greenwich at sunrise. Credit: Chris Gorman / The Big Ladder Photographer™

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