

Following a £1.1m renovation project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), English Heritage and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC), the statement castle built by Hamelin de Warenne, half brother to King Henry II, and the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, re-opened its doors to the public on Saturday 10 May with a brand new visitor centre, state of the art interpretation and enhanced education facilities, together bringing history to life in for all those who visit.

Liz Page, Historic Properties Director North comments: "The extensive work carried out at Conisbrough Castle means we can offer a first class experience to those visiting for a family day out as well as the thousands of school children who visit us each year to discover more about their fascinating local history. We have worked hard to find dynamic new ways to bring the castle to life and are excited and confident that visitors will see the positive difference this renovation has made."

Fiona Spiers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Yorkshire and The Humber, said: "We have been delighted to support this project that will give young people, in particular, new and enjoyable ways of learning about the castle's history and the lives of people who lived there during the medieval and later periods."

Visitors to Conisbrough Castle can enjoy anew the striking octagonal-shaped landmark at the heart of the local community in Yorkshire. The new visitor centre has been built onto the existing Victorian lodge and the surrounding public park has been landscaped, connecting a new path created from the lower entry gate opposite the car park. The visitor centre will house the new specially created activity space, the retail area and the initial story of this 'Grand

Design’ castle, together with display cabinets of artefacts from the castle.

Particular highlights of the exhibition include the ‘digital dolls house’ – a 1.5m high model of the keep with a cutaway section which reveals an animated interior, with furniture, fixings, roaring fires and people going about their daily activities. This can be viewed up close and will enable visitors to envisage more clearly life in the castle. The artefacts on display throughout the seven glass cases are primarily from the area, travelling across time from the medieval age to the 21st century, from the elegant seal of socialite Lady Isabel de Warenne, (on loan from the British Library from this July), to a fish and chip box featuring the castle on its packaging.

The display in the keep tells a story of its own, with the walls brought to life by new digital characters as they prepare for a royal visit from Henry II himself. Maintaining a truly local feel to the castle, members of the South Yorkshire community were used to inspire the faces of seven characters in the information panels around the site and the ‘talking walls’ AV in the keep. They include ladies maid Alice, based on local schoolgirl Chloe Hanley to Hamelin himself, Earl of Surrey, with the face of Mitch Norton.

A key focus of the project over the last year has been the work with the local community. Community Projects Manager Helen Keighley has spearheaded numerous projects which will ensure that the castle retains a close link to those who live around it. A strong team of volunteers has now been recruited to work throughout a variety of roles that will bring the castle to life for the present day visitor even further, including education and archaeology volunteers.

Peter Dale, Doncaster Council’s Director of Regeneration and Environment, said: “We are delighted with the investment in this fantastic new visitor centre which will benefit tourists and school visits alike. Tourism is a key growth area for Doncaster’s economy and visits to our attractions are up 14% in the past year.”

Two newly developed Discovery Visits are now available for schools to book. Led by our expert site team and volunteers, 'Tales from the Keep' and 'Meet the Medievals' are hands on sessions which bring history to life for Key Stage 1 - 3 students. Students dress up, handle artefacts and tour the keep whilst investigating what it would have been like to live and work here during the Medieval period.

Notes to editors

- Hamelin de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, was the illegitimate half brother of King Henry II and he married Isabel de Warenne, herself closely related to the Kings of France and Scotland. Conisbrough Castle was their fashionable ‘pied a terre’, an impressive and unique in Britain castle keep, standing proud over the surrounding countryside.
- At the end of 2013, English Heritage launched a quest to find the ‘Faces’ of Conisbrough Castle and received keen interest from visitors to get involved. Seven characters were selected by curators to tell some of the many different stories of the castle through a handful of the people who lived and worked there across its 800 or more years. The faces of the main characters on the information panels around the site and the ‘talking walls’ AV in the keep have been based on the features of the competition winners.
- The new activity centre can accommodate groups of up to 35 and is a dedicated family learning and community space. A bright and light space with windows looking directly out to the castle it has digital capabilities and full facilities for creative learning. The space has been designed to support and enhance new curriculum guidelines, with a timeline of the castle fully around the walls of the space and a handling collection.
- The new visitor centre has full facilities with baby change and disabled access.
- Discovery Visits cater for sessions of up to 30 students and enable teachers to bring their classroom outside and into the heart of history. The sessions are facilitated by English Heritage experts and carry a charge of £100 per session. More information on our 400 sites can be made via our Education Bookings Team or on the English

Heritage Education page.

- Further information on Doncaster's visitor attractions is available on the Visit Doncaster website.
- English Heritage is the custodian of over 400 historic monuments, buildings and sites through which we bring the story of England to life for over 10million visitors each year. Further information is available on the English Heritage website or follow them on Facebook.

Further information

Lindsey Porter, PR Manager-North, email: Lindsey.porter@english-heritage.org.uk or 01904 601 884 or 07920 181 666.