Discovering Cefn Ila's habitats, hospitals and



A new generation of local people and visitors alike will now have the opportunity to discover the built, natural and social heritage of one of Usk's best kept secrets; Cefn Ila. The grant has been awarded to Coed Cadw - The Woodland Trust in Wales, and will enable them to restore built elements of this unique natural space that have been derelict for over 40 years whilst also protecting and managing the many scarce habitats at the site.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund in Wales, said "This is an excellent project which offers a range of opportunities for young and old alike to discover Cefn Ila's rich heritage. By forging partnerships with organisations such as The Woodland Trust we can work in new and exciting ways to protect every part of our heritage, not only the old buildings and ruins, but the thriving wildlife and habitats to be enjoyed by all."

Natural Heritage

Cefn Ila plays a vital role in the biodiversity of the local area, with surrounding newly planted woodland now providing unbroken corridors and linkage between existing ancient woodland. The site is designated as one of Cadw's registered Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales and is home to a bat maternity roost, song thrushes and marsh tits and a number of priority habitats under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, emphasising the site's importance in providing a refuge for the priority species that live there.

Through the Discover Cefn Ila project the Woodland Trust will work with a range of partners to encourage new audiences to learn about and explore the unique history of Cefn Ila. An exciting and innovative visitor experience will be created with public access improved throughout the site so that everyone can experience the restored Victorian pleasure grounds, the walled garden and the rare heritage fruit tree orchard at the site.

Monmouthshire Assembly Member and member of the Assembly's Cross Party Group on Biodiversity, Nick Ramsay, said: "Cefn Ila reflects the rich natural heritage that we have in Monmouthshire but this project reminds us that we need to protect it. I look forward to being able to visit the site myself as it develops into a nature heritage hub. In the past 40 years, two thirds of the ancient woodland in Gwent has been lost and it is therefore vital that we understand and enhance what is left."

WWII Evacuee Hospital

Amongst its many interesting stories from the past, the mansion at Cefn Ila was once home to a maternity hospital which also served as a sick bay for evacuees from London during the Second World War, however it was destroyed by a fire in 1973. Women and children also lived here during the war and generations of local people have strong memories and links with the house's history and gardens, having been born or worked there during its busy life. The Discover Cefn Ila project will capture these memories with an oral history project, developed in partnership with Usk Rural Life Museum, which will reveal the stories and experiences of those with a connection to the hospital.

In welcoming the grant, Barry Embling, Cefn Ila Site Manager said "We have a strong history of working with the Heritage Lottery Fund, having received funding for projects across Wales, such as the Plas Power Woods project in Wrexham. It is vital that our wildlife and habitats are protected and we are grateful that the HLF continuously recognise the importance of nature as a key part of our national heritage in Wales."

Notes to Editors

This £297,700 grant has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to the Woodland Trust.

The Heritage Lottery Fund is the UK's largest dedicated funder of heritage:

- It invests around £375million a year on a broad range of projects - from museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions
- HLF has supported just over 35,500 projects allocating more than £5.6billion across the UK since the establishment of the Lottery in 1994
- In Wales HLF has invested over £284 million and supported over 2,162 projects in local communities all over the country.

About the Discover Cefn Ila project:

- Cefn Ila is a mosaic woodland site which comprises of a derelict 19th-century hospital, bat maternity roost, walled garden, 19th-century Arboretum and orchard, all of which have fallen into neglect.
- The Woodland Trust will create new opportunities for 23 volunteers, local community groups and schools to learn about the biodiversity and social heritage of Cefn Ila, and actively contribute towards its conservation.

- An Oral Histories project will gather memories and artefacts about the old maternity and convalescence hospital, which will be used in new interpretation of the site.
- The Woodland Trust will explore the potential to work in partnership with local museums to create an exhibition to tell the stories and experiences of people relating to the former hospital, using materials gathered during the oral history element of the project.
- Conservation work will include restoring the walled garden, reinstating historic railings and recreating steps and seating in the arboretum.
- A 'wilderness' area will be created in the walled garden as a tranquil wildlife spot for visitors and beekeepers, and a community heritage fruit tree project will result in a sustainable orchard.

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