Dudley Zoo gets go ahead for £1.15m Tecton restoration

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded development funding of just over £123,000 for the three year project. The first-round pass* means that DZG have up to two years to submit more detailed plans and apply for a full HLF grant of just over £970,000 towards the project.

Home to some of the rarest animals in the world, DZG lies within a conservation area that includes the 11th century Dudley Castle, and attracts more than 200,000 visitors a year.

It also contains the world's largest single collection of Tecton buildings, named after the renowned Modernist architects chosen to design the Zoo in the 1930s and led by Russian-born Berthold Lubetkin.

The Tecton Group were instrumental in bringing modernist architecture to the UK, and this complex survives as the only collection of interrelated Tecton designs in Britain and one of few remaining throughout Europe.

The scheme, scheduled to begin in 2012, will see the repair, renovation and new interpretation of four of the Tecton structures – Bear Ravine, Front Entrance, Safari Shop and Kiosk One – plus the refurbishment of the region's only chairlift which next year celebrates its 50th anniversary. The Tecton structures were designed and constructed between 1935 and 1937 using reinforced concrete - a pioneering system at the time.

The funding will also support a signage and education project for the programme.

DZG Chairman, Cllr David Spark, OBE, said: "These buildings are amongst the most significant in the history of modern architecture. People just do not realise how much today's world has been shaped by the concepts and techniques pioneered with these buildings in the 1930s."

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the West Midlands, said:"We're extremely pleased to give initial support to Dudley Zoo for this fascinating project to restore some of these rare structures. Whilst this is just the beginning of the journey, the award of this development money will enable DZG to work up their plans for a full grant in the future."

Consultations started in 2008 and within a year all 12 of the zoo's Modernist structures had received World Monuments Fund status and placed on a watch list alongside Machu Picchu and the Taj Mahal, ensuring a global focus on the world's largest single collection of Tecton buildings.

Peter Suddock, Chief Executive of DZG, said: "This is fantastic news. It's been a long journey and we have worked very closely with Heritage Lottery Fund, the World Monuments Fund, English Heritage and The Twentieth Century Society throughout. At the moment we are preparing final details, and subject to the necessary approvals, phase one will start with the chairlift refurb next spring."

Jon Wright, Senior Caseworker for The Twentieth Century Society, said: "Dudley Zoo's significance to the history of modern architecture in the UK cannot be underestimated and the Society are pleased to see so many organisations and

individuals working to save these iconic Lubetkin buildings."

Alan Taylor, Inspector of Historic Buildings, English Heritage, said: "English Heritage welcomes this initiative to restore the highly significant listed Tecton buildings and looks forward to working closely with Dudley Zoo and its partners to help develop the project."

Larry Priest, of Bryant Priest Newman architects, said: "We are very pleased to be working with DZG in developing detailed proposals for the repair of four of the modernist Tecton Structures. The buildings, unknown to many, are of worldwide importance and we hope this is the first step in what will ultimately be the repair and conservation of all of the structures at Dudley. I visited the zoo as a young child, as a student of architecture and as an adult with my own children and feel very privileged to be involved with the project."

Welcome Plaza

The £1.15million will be further boosted by £300,000 of DZG funding to provide a new Welcome Plaza. This will include the reconfiguring of eight turnstile entrances to allow immediate access from the public footpath.

Internal space will comprise a ticketing area, with points adjacent to flamingos, chairlift and camels and also a cafe, shop and toilet block.

Mr Suddock said: "Direct access from the car park to the Welcome Plaza means visitors will no longer have to queue outside the site. After a long journey they will be able to call into the cafe, make use of the family toilets and plan their visit in relaxed surroundings before setting off around the site."

He added: "The Welcome Plaza will be funded entirely by DZG's own resources; a fantastic achievement in the current economic climate. It really is the best news - in 2012 we celebrate our 75th anniversary, and as one of the oldest tourist attractions in the country this announcement gives us a very bright future."

Notes to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets HLF's criteria for funding and they believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Further information

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Get closer to the world's rarest animals at Dudley Zoological Gardens.