Heritage steaming ahead in North Wales

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The Trust, a registered charity, owns the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways that run steam trains between Caernarfon and Blaenau Ffestiniog via Porthmadog in Snowdonia.

The project ‘Taith in Treftadaeth / Our Heritage Journey’ has been given a 'round one' pass by the HLF which means The Trust can now progress to the next stage of the HLF application process to secure funding. It has up to two years to submit more detailed plans and apply for the £332,200 of HLF support they are seeking for the £531,878 project.

Plans include providing equipment and materials for a major volunteer initiative to uncover, restore and interpret the railway’s heritage including many of its historic boundary walls and fences. Volunteers will be trained in conservation skills as well as tour guides to help bring the railway’s heritage back to life.

Dr John Prideaux, Chairman of the Ffestiniog Railway Trust, says: "The funding will mainly be aimed at facilitating this work, to be performed almost entirely by volunteers. The Ffestiniog Railway Trust is aware of the vital contribution that our volunteers play in keeping the railway running and without whom the substantial contribution of around £15 million a year and more than 400 direct and indirect jobs that the railway makes to the local economy would not be possible.

"Volunteers take part because they find the railway worthwhile, and because they enjoy being part of a community of like minded people. Those volunteers have produced a quality of input that no enterprise of the size of our railway could normally attract let alone afford. Maintaining and developing the volunteer resource and its skills is a key objective for the years to come. This project aims to enthuse our volunteers anew and motivate new people of all ages to join in."

Plans also include the employment of an education and heritage officer to help schools, learners and visitors get the most out of their visit. Informal and enjoyable learning for visitors of all ages will be at the heart of the project, and this will extend to the railway's volunteer workforce. It is hoped more local people will be encouraged to join the volunteer workforce and play a part in their local heritage whilst learning new skills and meeting new people.

The project also aims to develop Minffordd and Dinas Stations as 'signing on points' for educational visits. Minffordd will be developed as a heritage centre where visitors will be able to view historic railway items, some dating back to the 1830’s.

Adds Dr Prideaux: "Every visitor on our railway is celebrating the unique Welsh achievement in the invention of the steam narrow gauge railway. But the railway is not just for visitors. This aspect of local history draws in people from all over the world and helps maintain our local community’s special identity and language and this project is something all local people can get involved in.”

Jennifer Stewart, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, added: “This project aims to restore this historic and unique railway and improve the visitor experience through training local people. The increased skilled volunteer base will help ensure the railway’s future sustainability which is an important tourism attraction for the area. As such we have warded a development grant in recognition of the project’s potential and the benefits it could bring to the community.”

Notes to editors

* A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we 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.

On occasion an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

The Ffestiniog Railway Trust is a registered charity that exists to hold a majority shareholding in the Ffestiniog Railway - the oldest railway company in the world still running trains, being founded by Act of Parliament in 1832. The railway was built as a gravity and horse drawn line to transport slate from the quarries in the mountains around Blaenau Ffestiniog. As the slate industry flourished, so did the railway and the town of Porthmadog. Slates from Blaenau Ffestiniog were exported all over the globe - many in ships built in Porthmadog.

The Ffestiniog introduced many innovative engineering solutions to cope with the rapid increase in output from the quarries and in the number of passengers it carried, including introducing the world's first bogie carriages. The Ffestiniog Railway has influenced the design and construction of railways in many countries.

Since the 1950s, the Ffestiniog Railway has become a leader in railway preservation and is now one of the UK's top tourist attractions.

Boston Lodge – the oldest operational railway works in the world – has now produced new steam locomotives in the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries, starting in 1879 with Double Fairlie Merddin Emrys, which is still in daily use today. In 2010, replica Lynton & Barnstaple railway locomotive Lyd was outshopped as the culmination of a 15 year, £500,000 programme.

The Welsh Highland Railway is North Wales' newest - and the UK's longest - heritage railway and when open throughout from Caernarfon to the Ffestiniog Railway's Harbour Station in Porthmadog in 2011, the two lines will offer visitors a journey across Snowdonia more than 40 miles in length. Welsh Highland trains cross the width of the Snowdonia National Park, past the foot of Snowdon and the beautiful village of Beddgelert, before travelling the length of the Aberglaslyn Pass - voted the most beautiful spot in the UK by members of the National Trust. In 2010, an additional three miles of track was brought into service to a new southern terminus at Pont Croesor, alongside the RSPB's Glaslyn Osprey Centre.

A new halt at Nantmor was also opened, allowing walkers the option of walking through the Aberglaslyn pass in either direction and returning by train.

In addition to employing some 65 full-time staff, independent research shows that the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways generate over £15 million for the local economy each year and create a further 350 jobs in the area. Over 1,000 volunteers regularly visit the railways to work in every aspect of their operation, from tracklaying to engine driving. Visitors to both railways can enjoy the outstanding natural beauty of Snowdonia as they pass through areas inaccessible by road undisturbed by the sights and sounds of modern life.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range

of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural tr aditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects allocating over £4.3 billion across the UK, including more than 1,800 projects totalling over £200 million in Wales.

Further information

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