HLF invests £1.3m for Bristol and North Somerset's famous Victorian heritage

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The iconic Clifton Suspension Bridge and Clevedon Pier, who have each received Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grants of £595,000 and £720,000 respectively, can now get started with exciting heritage projects.

Since 1994, HLF has invested over £84m into preserving Bristol and North Somerset's rich and varied heritage. From restoring SS Great Britain to creating a first-class museum experience at M-Shed, the effect of Lottery money is plain for all to see. Today's two grants will add to this investment and revitalise some of the area's most impressive heritage hotspots.

Richard Bellamy, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "These two projects reflect the truly wonderful Victorian heritage we have here in Bristol and North Somerset. Today's substantial HLF investment will not only enable vital improvement works to begin at both sites but also offer a fantastic range of training and volunteering opportunities for local people, ranging from curating exhibitions to supporting community events. We are delighted to be supporting these transformational projects that will provide real and far-reaching benefits to local heritage, communities and visitors."

Clifton Suspension Bridge Heritage and Learning Centre - £595,000

Opened in 1864, the Clifton Suspension Bridge was designed by and completed as a memorial to Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Spanning the dramatic Avon Gorge and linking Bristol and North Somerset, the bridge is a defining image of Bristol. HLF's grant will enable the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust to open up the bridge's unique history to a much wider audience in time for the 150th anniversary of the bridge's completion in 2014. A new learning centre will be built, on the North Somerset side of the bridge, and will provide space for schools and community groups to meet and learn.

Learning themes include: Brunel and Bristol; engineering past and present; and the history of Avon Gorge. A range of exhibits will based around these themes, among others, and will encourage visitors to better understand the bridge and its place in local life over the last hundred years. The Trust's volunteer base, currently consisting of 30 people, will be expanded as part of the project with the help of extended space and improved facilities. Volunteers will have the chance to gain new skills including, exhibition design, conservation practices and website design. A new Community Learning and Volunteering Officer will be recruited and will lead the volunteer troupe.

Laura Hilton, Visitor Services Manager at Clifton Suspension Bridge, said: "The new visitor centre will create a place for visitors to discover the legacy of Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel and his 'first love', one of the first modern suspension bridges and the longest and highest designed in its time, as well as the geology and biodiversity of its incredible setting. With displays and interactives to explain how the bridge works – and how it is still able to cope with the demands of modern traffic without change or alteration to its design, and the stories of those who travelled over and worked on the bridge throughout its 150 year history, the new centre will provide in-depth information to an anticipated 100,000 visitors from all over the world. We plan to work with local people in the development of the new centre, collaborating with schools, colleges and community groups to develop new displays and hands-on activities focussing on the icon of Bristol and its creator. Alongside this, a range of exciting new programmes for schools and colleges will

see children and young people exploring the bridge in new ways – whilst ‘behind the scenes’ tours for booked groups will provide a new way for visitors to understand the structure.”

Dayrell McArthur, Chairman of the Trustees, said “The support provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund is enabling us to embark on a project we would not otherwise be able to fund. The temporary visitor centre has proven that there is strong demand for information about the bridge, its history and its upkeep.”

Clevedon Pier: Providing a sustainable future - £720,000

As the only intact Grade I listed pier in England, Clevedon Pier is of immense heritage importance and much-loved by the local community. Opened to the public in 1869, the pier - consisting of a promenade stretching into the sea, built using old Barlow railway lines from Brunel’ s Great Western Railway broad gauge, a glazed pavilion and pagodas - stands as a reminder of the golden Victorian age of seaside holidays. HLF’s funding will enable the Clevedon Pier and Heritage Trust to create a sustainable future for the pier ensuring its survival for the next hundred years. Central to the plans is vastly improving the visitor facilities on site and increasing learning and volunteering opportunities for local people – helping to generate income for the Trust and enable the restoration of some of the piers most important elements.

A much-needed new visitor space will be created and used for community events, workshops and learning activities and will also include a café and toilet facilities, helping the Pier become a first-class heritage attraction once again. These improvements will also boost visitor numbers and contribute to the local economy. An exciting range of learning activities will be introduced and be based around key themes, including the exploring the engineering behind the pier structure and the social and natural history of the site and surrounding area. The existing volunteer team will be increased and will have important roles to play, including leading guided tours, supporting school visits and planning community events.

Simon Talbot-Ponsonby, Chairman of Clevedon Pier and Heritage Trust, said: "This is a huge step forward for the Pier Trust in helping us to achieve our ambition of providing good facilities for our visitors whilst also providing us with the means to become financially self-sufficient when it comes to carrying out all the essential maintenance needed on this beautiful pier. It is fantastic that these two local icons of Victorian engineering in North Somerset have both been awarded grants in order that visitors will be able to enjoy and more fully appreciate the pier and the bridge in their surroundings."

Notes to editors

The Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust is a non-profit-making registered charity, and is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the bridge. These functions are funded solely through the toll income received from motorists who currently pay 50p to cross the bridge (with discounts for regular users).

Clevedon Pier and Heritage Trust took a 99 year lease from the council in 1981, having successfully demonstrated to a public inquiry that the pier could be saved and should not be demolished following its partial collapse under a load test in 1970. The trust has since raised all the money to repair and rebuild the pier, reopening it to the public in 1989. The final stage of its restoration was achieved with the completion of the Pier Head in 1998 with a £1.2m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Further information

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