Shetland’s heritage

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Sitting on the southern tip of mainland Shetland, one of Scotland’s finest surviving examples of an early 19th-century lighthouse is to be restored and opened up to the public with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant announced today.

Built in 1821 by Robert Stevenson, grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson, Sumburgh Head Lighthouse is for many the first glimpse of the Shetland mainland as they approach by sea or air. The group of buildings includes a 1905 foghorn and one of the first British radar stations, Chain Home Low Radar Station, which was added to the site during World War Two. Sumburgh Head holds a fascination for visitors making it the second most popular attraction on Shetland even though it is difficult to reach and is closed to the public because of its current condition.

A grant of £683,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund will help restore the buildings and improve access to them. The existing engine room will be refurbished and used to interpret the story of the Lighthouse and the Stevenson family while the radar huts will be opened up to tell the history of the site during World War Two. There will also be an interpretation facility looking at the natural heritage of Sumburgh Head. Sitting on the southern tip of the island, the area is an established RSPB Reserve supporting 35,000 breeding seabirds including fulmar, guillemot, kittiwake, puffin, razorbill and shag. It has dramatic views to the most remote inhabited British island, Fair lsle, and is a popular location for whale watching, with sightings of killer and minke whales, dolphins and porpoises. The West Pavilion will be developed into self-catering holiday accommodation, generating income to maintain the other buildings.

Commenting on the grant announcement, Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: “This is an exciting project which will open up so many aspects of Shetland’s heritage so we are delighted to give it our support. Sumburgh Head is on a popular visitor circuit which includes the 4,000 year old site at Jarlshof and the Iron Age village of Old Scatness. The interpretation of the buildings and the natural environment around them will add so much more to the visitor experience and encourage others to discover the magnificence of this part of Shetland’s coast.”

Jimmy Moncrieff, Shetland Amenity Trust General Manager, said: “This is a tremendous boost for the Sumburgh Head project, which will significantly enhance the visitor experience and the educational potential of the site.”

This year the Heritage Lottery Fund celebrates its 15th anniversary. Since it began, it has invested over £7.8million in transforming Shetland’s heritage. Large projects such as the New Shetland Museum and Archives and Viking Unst to smaller projects such as the Shetland Place Name project and the Northern Coastal Experience, which involved the construction of three replica Shetland boats have benefitted, along with many others, in Heritage Lottery Fund support.

Notes to editors

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 traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. To date it has invested over £500million in Scotland’s heritage.

The Sumburgh Head project is part of the wider heritage and culture services provided for Shetland by the Shetland

Amenity Trust.