Vindolanda to boost the North East economy

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With a 35% decline in visitor figures to Hadrian's Wall since 1970 and the recent cuts in government spending for regional tourism, the imminent re-opening of The Vindolanda Trust's two sites; Roman Vindolanda and The Roman Army Museum at Greenhead will be a welcome boost to the region's economy.

Having been awarded £4 million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant in 2009, The Vindolanda Trust is set to complete its £6.3 million re-developments and open to the public on 12 March this year. The official opening by The Duchess of Northumberland will take place on 19 April.

The re-developments at the two sites will have a substantial economic impact on the region's businesses. The museum at Vindolanda has been radically transformed, incorporating outstanding visual displays of the living archaeology at Vindolanda as well as an education centre and state of the art design and audio visual effects.

The re-development of both sites aims to see visitor levels soar, with an estimated 20,000 additional visitors to the sites, just under half of those being overnight visitors. With an estimated off-site spend estimated at £350,000 per annum, The Vindolanda Trust will be responsible for a major contribution to the region's tourism income generation.

At Greenhead, 7 miles down the road from Vindolanda - the Roman Army Museum, will house the region's first 3D film. The film, The Eagle's Eye – Edge of Empire, created by Newcastle film company, Dene Films, will portray the life of a Roman soldier. The film, which was shot in May of last year, follows the story of Aquila, a young Roman Army recruit adjusting to the surroundings of his new position as an auxiliary guard.

The film will be housed within a purpose built cinema room at the Roman Army Museum. The Roman Army Museum, like Vindolanda, has been radically transformed as part of the developments, showcasing artefacts from Roman Army history, telling the story of Hadrian and his journey as Emperor. The sites have previously been of great appeal to school trips as well as those interested in ancient history and archaeology – due to the live excavations that takes place at Vindolandathroughout the summer. The new developments will widen the appeal of the two sites with visitor numbers forecast to increase by up to 30%.

The Vindolanda Trust received the funding following a successful bid to the HLF. In the lead up to the re-opening The Trust will be showcasing the 3D film at The Tyneside Cinema, the film will be shown with an invited audience, with attendees including; schools, trustees, media and VIP guests on the 1 March. The sites will be officially opened by Her Grace, The Duchess of Northumberland, on the 19 April with the sites opening to the public on the 12 March.

The added visitors will be a welcome boost to the region's tourism economy. With over 2000 oversees visitors staying several nights in the region, there is ample opportunity for regional businesses to benefit from their expenditure.

Patricia Birley, Director at The Vindolanda Trust, comments: "We are thrilled about the developments at our sites; we are confident that they will have a significant contribution to the region's economy and both sites are going to offer world class visitor experiences. We are delighted with how the film looks and we can't wait to unveil it to the public when we open on 12 of March. We have not put our prices up, despite these new facilities, and we can't wait to show them off."

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said: "We are delighted to have been able to support the Vindolanda Trust and its passionate staff with these vital redevelopments. The improved site access means that more people than ever will be able to come and appreciate the wonderful Roman artefacts on show. Both sites provide visitors with a snapshot of the ancient world and now, the visitor experience will befit such a historically important place and encourage people to learn more about our Roman history."

The Vindolanda Trust is in an independent charity which funds all of its aims and objectives, including the excavation, research, conservation and education programmes, with the income it raises from the general public.The Trust does not receive annual income from any other source. The Trust has been part of a number of high profile finds from the Roman world and most recently a bronze griffin figure, from the tip of a soldier's helmet.

Dan Snow, historian and broadcaster, said: "The Vindolanda Trust's passion for archaeology is truly infectious. I was up there last summer and saw the excitement with which staff and a huge number of volunteers carried out the excavations and interpretation for visitors. I can personally endorse the really important work they do.

"Vindolanda is one of the most important Roman sites in the world. Discoveries being made there are scrutinised as avidly in Syria and Libya as they are in Northern England. Yet the first thing the visitor notices there are the vast unexcavated spaces in and around the fort. What further treasures will the ground yield? We can be absolutely certain that the story of Vindolanda is not nearly complete."

To find out more about the redevelopments at Vindolanda, and how you can get involved please contact Fiona Watson, Information Officer on 01434 344277.

Notes to editors

The Vindolanda Trust is an independent archaeological charitable trust, founded in 1970. The Vindolanda Trust does not receive any annual funding and relies on the visitors to both Roman Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum to fund its archaeological, conservation and education work.
Roman Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum are both situated in the heart of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, Roman Vindolanda is just to the north of the village of Bardon Mill and the Roman Army Museum is next to the village of Greenhead. Roman Vindolanda is one of the most exciting sites along Hadrian's Wall with its wealth of archaeological remains and ongoing excavations. Our archaeologists will be working on site Monday to Friday each week (weather permitting) from 4 April until 16
 September 2011 – so visitors can come along and talk to the archaeologists and watch as the story of Vindolanda continues to be discovered. The Roman Army Museum is an extensive indoor museum which gives a fantastic introduction and insight into the Roman army and the life of a soldier. Both sites are open 7 days a week from 12 March 2011, at 10am until 5pm in March, October and November and until 6pm from April to September until 13 November 2011.

www.vindolanda.com

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. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects allocating £4.5billion across the UK including £214millon in the North East alone.

Further information

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