Dorset County Museum wins £10.3million National



The Weymouth Bay pliosaur

The main aims of the project are to provide a new state of the art learning centre, better archive and storage facilities and better public access to displays of the Museum's vast collection.

This will be achieved through the sensitive yet contemporary redevelopment of the current building, which will transform Dorset County Museum's facilities and double its visitor numbers. There will be new gallery spaces, area for researchers to work and open workshop spaces so the public can see for themselves the fascinating inner workings of the museum. This project will enable the restoration and preservation of the historic Revd. John White's Rectory. There will also be a new shop and tearoom, accessible from the street.

The award of initial stage one funding of £483,900 will enable a detailed two-year development plan to take place ahead of final submission to the HLF in May 2017. This would enable building work to start in 2017 and the Collections Discovery Centre to be opened to the public by 2020.

The museum is housed in the centre of Dorchester in a beautiful high Victorian gothic building of architectural importance which will be carefully preserved during the works. More than 45,000 people visit the museum every year, along with 5,000 local school children. It is anticipated that the new Collections Discovery Centre will become a focal point for locals and visitors to Dorset alike, attracting twice as many visitors in the years to come.

Jon Murden, Director of Dorset County Museum, said: “This is a brilliant and exciting opportunity for Dorset. For the first time we will have the space to do justice to our amazing collections, whilst ensuring they are safely preserved for future generations to enjoy. We would like to thank all of the organisations and individuals who have supported us with this bid. In particular we would like to thank, Arts Council England, Wessex Museums Partnership, Dorset County Council, West Dorset District Council and Dorchester Town Council.”

The Lord Fellowes of West Stafford, Patron of the Dorset County Museum Development Appeal, added: “This project will enable the Museum to bring world class exhibitions to the local area, and develop its role as a cultural and community hub for a range of events and activities. By 2020, while retaining and respecting its Victorian roots, the museum will have been completely transformed into a modern, sustainable heritage service that serves twice as many visitors, making an even more significant contribution to the local economy.”

Robin Potter, Mayor of Dorchester, said: “On behalf of the Town Council and the people of the town can I express our absolute delight at the success of the museum’s lottery bid. The project will not only allow the Museum to provide a fitting home for the storage interpretation and research into Dorset’s fascinating history; it will also become the essential cornerstone that the town’s Tourism sector has been looking for to stimulate significantly increased interest in visiting Dorchester to explore the town’s rich cultural heritage, creating more jobs and a more diverse local economy. The Town Council is keen now to do it’s part in helping Dorset County Museum raise the remaining, but not inconsiderable, £3million needed to make the scheme a reality.”

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Nerys Watts, Head of HLF South West, said: “From the spectacular Weymouth Bay pliosaur to the largest Thomas Hardy collection in the world, the collections at Dorset County Museum provide an unrivalled picture of 185 million years of our area’s heritage. We’re thrilled to support these plans which will transform the museum, preserve their incredible collections and finally enable visitors to get a true insight into Dorset’s past. We look forward to seeing the plans develop.”

Notes to Editors

About Dorset County Museum

Dorset County Museum is one of the leading independent, charitable, heritage organisations in the south west of England. It has a learned Society with 2,000 members and receives over 47,000 visitors a year. Its diverse collections contain over four million objects including internationally significant geology, archaeology and literary collections.

The museum operates independently with financial support from Dorset County Council and West Dorset District Council.

Its mission is:

- The advancement of education for the general benefit of the public in the areas of archaeology, the natural sciences, natural history, literature, music, the fine and decorative arts, antiquities and local history relating to the County of Dorset
- The acquisition, preservation, conservation, exhibition and development (as far as possible) of collections relating to archaeology, the natural sciences, natural history, literature, music, the fine and decorative arts, antiquities and local history relating to the County of Dorset

For more information visit the Dorset County Museum website.

Further information

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The Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank at sunset Ant Holloway



Derby Silk Mill in the Derwent Valley

May brings £100m funding boost!