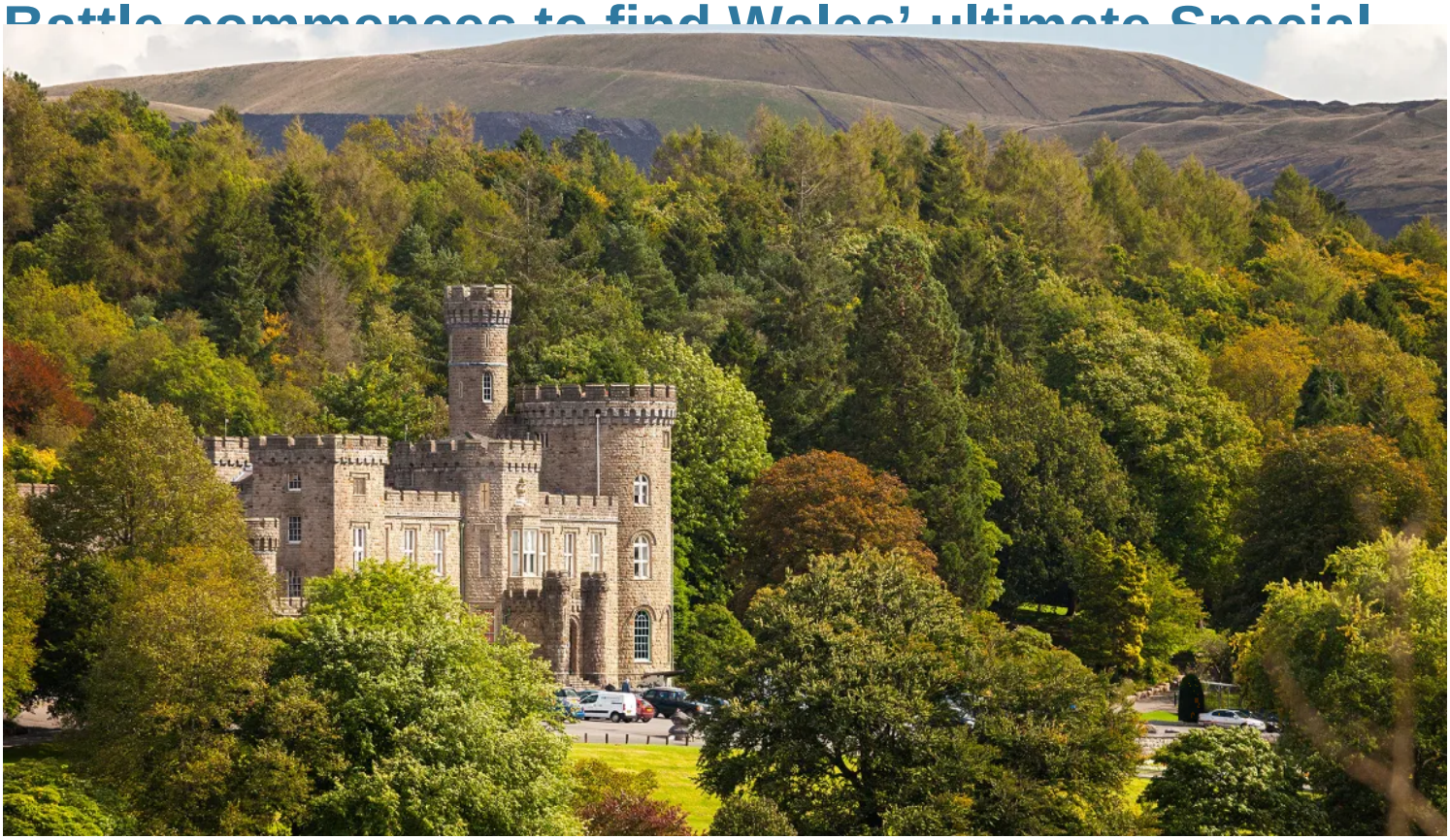
Battle commences to find Wales' ultimate Special



Castell Cyfarthfa

Five leading Welsh celebrities will be stepping up to a different kind of electoral hustings in the coming months to try and secure victory for their team in Special Places Wales 2015.

The celebrities will be vigorously campaigning for the public to pick a winner from one of the five different voting categories they will champion in this year's competition, once again organised by National Trust Wales.

The conservation charity ilaunched on 14 May, teaming up with celebrities, culture and heritage bodies and communities across Wales to generate a national conversation to find Wales' most special place for 2015.

Last year, people voted in their thousands in the inaugural competition and Penarth Pier and Pavilion was crowned the winner following a conversation which reached from the Senedd to the schoolyard.

The campaign was launched at the Pier with a number of the campaign's partnering bodies in attendance (as well as a local primary school sharing stories of their own Special Places in Wales, what makes them so special and what memories they have of them.

In a change from last year, the 2015 competition will introduce five specific voting categories, influenced by the diverse range of special places found across Wales. Each category is being championed by a celebrity ambassador, who will be rallying the public to get behind their category.

Voting is now open for the first phase, which will see a winner crowned in each category. Voting can be done online through the Trust's website, Wales Online, Facebook or by using the hashtag #specialplaces on Twitter and Instragram until Tuesday 14 July.

Voters can also cast their preferences by filling in forms at National Trust sites, selected sites of partner organisations

Once the five category winners have been announced on 20 July, the five celebrities will then battle it out once again to see if their category winner can take the overall crown in a second round of public voting.

The categories are:

- Hollywood actor Matthew Rhys is supporting Glorious Coast. From secluded fishing coves to great sweeps of golden sands, the Welsh coastline from the National Trust-protected Rhossili Bay to Porthdinllaen, is some of the best in the world.

- TV presenter Matt Johnson is backing Parks and Gardens. Beautiful flower gardens, impressive landscape parks, places like Dinefwr Park and Bodnant Gardens, offer places for children to play and spaces to relax.

- Fashion designer Julien Macdonald is championing Wild Open Spaces. With a rugged coastline and dramatic landscapes like Snowdon and the Elan Valley, Wales is a land of great natural beauty.

- TV personality and weather presenter Sian Lloyd is getting behind Historic Buildings. From ancient strongholds and abbeys to castles and country manor houses, a rich architectural heritage can be seen across Wales from Powis Castle to Caernarfon Castle

- Olympian and hurdles world record holding athlete Colin Jackson is encouraging votes for the Quirky or Urban. From uber-modernist new builds to idiosyncratic old timers, Wales is full of bold and beautiful architecture, from Penarth Pier to Portmeirion.

Leader of 'Team Coast', actor Matthew Rhys, commented: "Asking me where my favourite place in Wales is like asking a parent to pick a favourite child. Seeing that it makes up almost two-thirds of our country's circumference, there aren't many places in the world that can boast 870 miles of uninterrupted coastal pathway with ridiculous variety – and that's why I'm heading up 'Team Coast' this year.

"From Ogmore's cliffs, to the perfect beaches of Gower and the rugged beauty of North Wales, Wales is literally the little big country, and I'm urging our nation to get behind our coasts this summer."

To inspire people to decide their favourite and to ignite a conversation across the whole of Wales, the Trust has listed last year's top 25 shortlist on this year's online voting forms – as a handy hint at what places featured strongly last year and which may come out as frontrunners once again. Favourites from last year included the likes of The Lonely Tree in

Llanfyllin, St. Fagan's Natural History Museum, Cyfarthfa Castle, Mwnt and Tenby.

Recent research by The Trust shows that more than three-quarters of people (78%) feel happier when they're outdoors above anywhere else – and the campaign will aim to get people out and about during the summer and celebrating the places that mean the most to them.

With people considering the National Trust Wales as a key player in looking after all of the Special Places in Wales (67%), the Trust is leading all of Wales' leading heritage and tourism bodies to collaborate on the campaign and lead a mass celebration of the diverse range of special places across Wales. Partners on board include:

- Visit Wales
- Cadw
- Sustain Wales- Cynnal Cymru
- Gladstone's Library
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Keep Wales Tidy
- National Museum Wales –
- Rambler's Cymru
- RSPB
- Penarth Pier and Pavilion
- Media Wales

National Trust Director for Wales, Justin Albert, also commented: "There's no doubt that we help to preserve some of the nation's most cherished and historic places, but we know that people are hugely passionate about all manner of places and that's why we want to champion them all during the competition.

"For a relatively small country, Wales has an extraordinary amount of special places. By working together with our partners and taking a 'Team Wales' approach, we feel we can do more to promote the wonderful heritage, outdoors and unique attractions we have in Wales.

"While our research shows people rank beaches and the countryside among their favourite places to escape, we want to kick-start an exciting conversation that heroes anything and everything – from our well-known tourist attractions to the untold, hidden gems. We're hoping the addition of five categories this year will help provoke the nation to pick their side and back it to the end."

The first stage of the Special Places competition runs from 14 May to 14 July and will look for the one winner within each of the five categories. Once decided, each category winner will then battle it out to be the ultimate Special Place in Wales and be crowned on 7 August.

To vote for your favourite category and name your special place, simply tweet the hastags #lleoeddarbennig/ #specialplaces to @NTWales or vote on Facebook.

Further information

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Notes to Editors:

The top five in each category from Special Places 2014 is:

Coast

- Rhossili Bay
- Mwnt
- Tenby
- Porthdinllaen
- Barafundle Bay

Wild Open Spaces

- The Lonely Tree
- Snowdon
- Pen y Fan
- Elan Valley
- Bosherston

Parks & Gardens

- Dyffryn House & Gardens
- Bodnant Garden
- Plas Newydd
- Dinefwr Park
- National Botanic Gardens of Wales

Historic Buildings

- Cyfartha Castle
- Erddig
- Powis Castle
- Caernarfon Castle
- Beaumaris Castle

Quirky or Urban

- Penarth Pier
- Hay on Wye
- St Fagans
- Barry Island
- Portmeirion

More about NT Wales

The National Trust was founded in 1895 to care for places of historic interest or natural beauty. In Wales it cares for over 45,000 hectares of countryside, 157 miles of coastline as well as some of the finest castles and gardens. The Trust is the largest conservation organisation in Europe, supported by more than four million members, more than 120,000 of whom live in Wales. As a charity it relies on membership subscriptions, gifts and other voluntary support to meet its £148million annual conservation and maintenance costs. The Trust’s properties have unique legal protection

inalienability – they cannot ever be sold or mortgaged without permission of Parliament. For more information on National Trust Wales please contact Ken Smith on tel: 07768 424394 or email: Kenneth.smith@nationaltrust.org.uk