Lottery funding kick starts £2m heritage project in



Canon re-enactment at the fort

Medway Council together with Fort Amherst Heritage Trust, have been successful in securing funding to help the area reconnect with its military roots and discover secrets from the past.

The £214,000 grant will be used to develop the plans for the project named Command of the Heights, and the council will apply for the full grant at a later date.

The huge project will include the careful demolition of Riverside One, which sits within the walls of the historically important Barrier Ditch.

The ditch was built during the Seven Years War (1754-1763) and it ran from where Riverside One currently stands and across into Fort Amherst. It was a critical part of the defences - an unscalable ditch and embankment which dramatically divided the military and civilian areas of Chatham. During the restoration process, it is expected that cannons and other military items could be discovered buried beneath the surface.

Facilities currently at Riverside One will relocate to Kingsley House in Gillingham in July.

Command of the Heights will also see the creation of a new entrance to Fort Amherst from Chatham town centre as well as the restoration of the Spur Battery - the highest part of Chatham within Fort Amherst once used for troop encampments, siege warfare training and military punishment. This will be transformed into an amphitheatre with seating to allow for outdoor performances, and the restoration of this area will also open up even more public green space at Great Lines Heritage Park.

Throughout the project there will be many opportunities to learn about the heritage of Chatham including the history behind Gun Wharf, which was the original location of the Tudor Dockyard. A busy programme of activities will enable the public to get involved in events such as community archaeology and much more.

Phase one of Command of the Heights will consist of development and planning and this will begin next month. Restoration works are anticipated to begin in early 2017 , with completion expected in late 2018.

Command of the Heights will extend and complement the HLF funded Command of the Oceans programme running at the Historic Dockyard, Chatham.

Medway Council's Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships Cllr Rodney Chambers said: "I am pleased we have been successful in securing funding for what is going to be an exciting project in Chatham. There is a lot to learn about the area's military and naval history, and through Command of the Heights we hope to capture the imagination of Medway residents and those from further afield."

Keith Gulvin, one of the original Fort Amherst Trustees, said: "This valuable funding represents the last major piece of a twenty-acre jigsaw which will have taken over three decades to complete. The work will be the culmination of a project started in 1984 that has continued relentlessly thanks to the dedication of our Trustees and volunteers who have donated their time, energy and skills to the project – all that has been missing is the financial support required for such expensive work, which this grant from HLF will now provide."

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: "We're delighted to support this ambitious project which will create both a physical and learning gateway into a fascinating part of Chatham's rich history. As well as restoring the remnants of the past, the involvement of the local community will ensure these stories are not forgotten. We look forward to seeing the plans develop."

Further information

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