From Margate to Yarmouth - National Lottery players boost investment into South East coastal

Yarmouth Pier Donna Taylor

Dotted right along the South East coast, the projects include confirmed Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awards of just over £1.1m to a project to restore Margate Caves and just under £780,000 towards conserving Yarmouth Pier. The ‘green light’ has also been given to three more projects with plans now in place to see Newhaven Fort reimagined for visitors, Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve brought alive for locals and visitors, and The Leas - Folkestone’s coastal park, restored.

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: “This funding, made possible by National Lottery players, will benefit coastal towns all the way from Margate to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight, rejuvenating key tourist attractions in the region and providing much needed investment into our coastal communities.”

Margate Caves Project - £1.1m HLF grant

The Margate Caves, known in the 1860’s as ‘Vortigern’s Cavern’, have been closed since 2004. Believed to have been a working chalk mine dating back to the 17th century, the caves have a fascinating history just waiting to be discovered.

Once the playground of flamboyant local landowner Francis Forster (complete with carvings and paintings commissioned by a local artist), the caves went on to become a tourist attraction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries before serving as an air raid shelter in the two World Wars.

Now, thanks to National Lottery players, this two-year project aims to reveal the caves secrets and open up the site for visitors to enjoy once more. To be run by volunteer led Margate Caves Community Education Trust (MCCET), the project is being jointly funded by HLF and the Big Lottery Fund to conserve the caves and wall paintings, as well as construct a new visitor centre above ground with café, shop and community spaces. In addition to community activity programmes, learning for schools and planned commissions for local artists, exhibition space will tell the story of the caves and their setting in Margate focusing on three themes: Landscape and Living – geology in Thanet; Holiday Makers and History – tourism and the growth of Margate; and Discovery and Loss – how the history of the caves mirrors the process of decline and regeneration of the seaside resort within which they lie.

The Pier's Tale - £778,400 HLF grant

Grade II listed Yarmouth Pier, the only wooden pier of its type in the UK, dates back to 1876 when it was built as a ferry terminus linking the Isle of Wight with the mainland. The pier was constructed entirely from timber and it is under constant attack from sea creatures such as the locally famous 'gribble' and its unique heritage is at risk.

This exciting new two-year project to be run by the Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners will restore the timber structure of the pier whilst highlighting all aspects of the Pier's 140 year life in Yarmouth, from its construction to the changes all around it and what lies beneath. The project will be launched at Yarmouth's Spring Festival on 29th April and includes events and activities throughout the year before the structural work begins in 2018.

As well as carrying out urgent repair works the project will encourage people to engage with the Pier and its constantly changing marine environment, by working with partners from universities, schools and the local community to develop a wide range of research opportunities, activities and events all helping the Pier to tell its fascinating tale.

Thanks to National Lottery players, three further South East England attractions have been given initial HLF support to develop new projects that will rejuvenate the communities in which they lie:

Revealing the past to secure the future: the renaissance of Newhaven Fort

Lewes District Council aim to unlock the full potential of Newhaven Fort as an asset for the town, a catalyst for regeneration and attraction for visitors. With a history going back to the Stone Age the current fort on the site is the largest man-made defence work in Sussex and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. £157,000 has been awarded in development funding to work up plans to restore its historic structure (part of which is on the Heritage at Risk Register), open up inaccessible areas, create new exhibitions and provide volunteering opportunities for the community.

Hidden Hastings Heritage

This exciting project aims to engage people with Hastings Country Park, a beautiful area of ancient gill woodland, cliff top grassland and lowland meadow sitting within the High Weald AONB to the East of Hastings. To be run by Groundwork South and Hastings BC the project, which has been awarded a £45,300 development grant, aims to reveal the areas rich natural, archaeological and historical heritage, improve the park's infrastructure, and run activities aimed

at people of all ages to bring the stories of the park alive.

The Spirit of the Leas – Improving access, understanding and enjoyment of Folkestone's coastal park

Folkestone's popular Coastal Park and historic Leas attract over 500,000 visitors annually and sit within a priority area for funding for HLF in east Kent. HLF has just offered Shepway District Council £40,300 funding to further develop a project which will restore historic paths and structures at the park and around Folkestone's Grade II listed Leas Cliff Hall. The project will also encourage greater community understanding of role of the Leas as a promenade and Folkestone's development as a coastal resort through an exciting range of activities centred on its musical, dance, fashion, architectural and geological heritage.

Further information

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- The Pier's Tale: Tim Adams, Chief Executive/Harbour Master, Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners, via email: tim.adams@yarmouth-harbour.co.uk or on tel: 01983 760321
- Newhaven Fort: Lisa Hayward, Marketing & Communications Manager, Wave Leisure, via email: lisa.hayward@waveleisure.co.uk or on tel: 01323 493061
- Hidden Hastings Heritage: Alex Snelling-Day, Senior Contract Development Manager, Groundwork South, on tel: 07702532769