Heritage Lottery Fund gives £2million to redevelop Fort Nelson

21/10/2009

With attractions of military might ranging from a 15th-century Turkish bombard, cannon captured at the Battle of Waterloo, and more recently Saddam Hussein's infamous Supergun, in the near future the Fort will give visitors an even more exciting experience, thanks to a grant of almost £2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The confirmed grant* to Royal Armouries will see improved visitor facilities, galleries and provide state-of-the-art education opportunities at the Fort, perched on Portsdown Hill overlooking Portsmouth Harbour and the Meon Valley.

Built in the 1860s on the orders of Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, the Fort was part of a chain of fortifications to protect Portsmouth and its naval base from a feared French invasion. However, it was pressed into service during the First World War as a transit camp for troops embarking for Europe and again during the Second World War when, supplying ammunition to anti-aircraft batteries, it once more protected Portsmouth dockyard, this time from German bombers.

Royal Armouries Museum Director,Peter Armstrong, said: "This Heritage Lottery Fund grant and the vital match-funding awards are a fantastic boost to the ambitious re-development programme which will bring the Fort's history to life by ensuring a quality experience that will continue to inform, challenge and entertain our visitor base whilst providing much-needed additional capacity to meet visitor demand."

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England Stuart McLeod, said: "Royal Armouries has had this redevelopment in its sights for some time and we are delighted to support this exciting project that will create improved displays, better information, superb education facilities and an excellent and memorable experience for visitors, researchers and schoolchildren."

The money will be used to transform the Scheduled Ancient Monument by introducing new and better-equipped visitor facilities, which will allow even more people to enjoy this free heritage attraction and its historic collection.

The attraction saw visitor numbers more than double between 2000 and 2005, and there is a need to ensure that all visitors have the widest possible access to Fort Nelson in order to understand the site's social history and environment, the communities it was built to protect and the historical importance of its collections. New galleries will bring these stories to life as well as providing a fitting home for the national collection of artillery and historic cannon.

The main projects included in the refurbishment comprise:

- A new, 355sq m, free visitor centre and facilities for Fort Nelson and Portsdown Hill outside the walls of the Fort, containing an information and welcome centre, larger shop and new café for use by visitors and passing traffic, cyclists and walkers.
- A dramatic new 450sq m entrance gallery – the Orienteur - displaying the most dramatic and iconic cannon in the collection including Saddam Hussein's infamous Supergun.

- A state-of-the-art education centre and facilities, including a new ‘classroom of the future’ and dedicated entrance.
- Re-siting the main visitor entrance so that visitors cross a dramatic original drawbridge to enter the fort and provision of a lift between both levels of the Fort to greatly enhance access for all.
- New parking facilities next to the site, providing easy access for the first time to the famous Nelson Monument.

In addition to the HLF grant, progress has also been made with the campaign to raise the additional £1.5 million match-funding needed to realise the project. Since a generous lead pledge by the Garfield

Weston Foundation, numerous funders have been inspired to follow suit with the total added to just last month by an £87,000 grant from the DCMS / Wolfson Foundation Galleries Improvement Fund – a vital ‘shot in the arm’ for the development.

The Fort Nelson free museum will remain open throughout the building phase in 2010, with an exciting programme of seasonal special events as well as all the daily features visitors have come to expect.

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project Fort Nelson Re-development is for £1,832,000 (53% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

The Royal Armouries at Fort Nelson houses the national collection of historic cannon and big guns. The museum houses one of the world’s finest collections with over 350 cannon dating back over 600 years and from every corner of the earth. The collection originated at HM Tower of London and has been on display in Hampshire since 1995. www.royalarmouries.org.uk

This year HLF is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 it has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, including £428million to more than 3,000 projects across the South East England region alone.

Further information

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