Canadian Pacific - engineering a future from the



The project will be carried out mainly in the railway's workshops at Ropley, Hampshire and its offices at Alresford, with some of the work carried out at the Eastleigh Railway Works where the locomotive was originally built in 1941. It will see the return to operation of one steam engine and two wooden framed carriages and provide valuable training in engineering skills.

The project to overhaul the railway's flagship steam engine Merchant Navy class No. 35005 'Canadian Pacific' and restore two wooden framed carriages will provide employment for 11 new members of staff, including eight technical people; six of whom will be apprentices with a two-year period of training. The scheme also provides work experience opportunities for local unemployed youngsters and engineering students at Eastleigh, plus a range of other community outreach activities, education and information benefits for the Watercress Line's thousands of visitors.

Much of the work will be done by the railway's many volunteers and it is hoped that the project will encourage more people to join the team. Development funding of £44,700 has also been awarded as part of HLF's initial support to help Mid Hants Railway Ltd and the supporting charity Mid Hants Railway Preservation Society Ltd, the companies behind the Watercress Line, progress their plans to apply for a full grant later this year. If the second round application is successful, then work should commence early in 2015 and be complete by the end of 2017.

‘Canadian Pacific’designed by Oliver Bullied, was purchased by the railway in 2002 under a strategy to own its own steam engines, but was withdrawn in 2008 in need of an expensive overhaul. It was taken to Eastleigh in 2011 to be stored under cover, and work to strip it in order to evaluate the scope and cost of the work started there early last year. The two wooden framed carriages are ex-Southern Railway vehicles also designed by Oliver Bulleid, which were built just after the war. They are the oldest carriages on the Watercress Line and will be run with a third similar carriage now nearing the end of an extensive overhaul in the workshops at Ropley.

Mrs Steve Crowther, Chair of Mid Hants Railway Preservation Society Ltd, said: “We are absolutely delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given this huge vote of confidence in the record of the Watercress Line’s staff and volunteers to complete projects on time and on budget. We now have to work hard to submit a successful second round application and that will eventually lead to some major new attractions on the Watercress Line.

“We have run a number of projects part funded by HLF over recent years. The principal ones have been the development of the new workshops at Ropley between 2010 and 2012, plus the training of 16 apprentices between 2009 and the present time. The railway is very appreciative of the help given by HLF without which so many excellent developments would not have been possible.”

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “This project provides an excellent opportunity to secure the long-term future of Hampshire’s railway heritage. Our initial support for plans to restore the ‘Canadian Pacific’ and Bulleid coaches to their former glory will help conserve this important heritage for generations to come, and through the enhanced visitor experience and extensive volunteering and training opportunities, more people will be able to learn about the social, political and economic significance of our historic railways.”

Notes to editors

A first-round pass / initial support means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

The Watercress Line is Hampshire’s only mainland standard gauge heritage railway, running for 10 miles through idyllic countryside between the market towns of Alton and Alresford. Originally part of British Railways until closure in 1973, the line and services were fully reinstated in 1985. Today, the Watercress Line is one of the South’s premier visitor attractions. The railway employs nearly 50 staff, and is supported by over 450 dedicated volunteers without which, it could not function. It is committed to preserving Hampshire’s railway heritage and maintains a fleet of steam and diesel locomotives, rolling stock and infrastructure that creates the essence of a bygone age. Training of the next generation of heritage railway engineers is seen as an essential part of the business. It provides a comprehensive timetable with trains running on some 200 days each year and which include many special events such as steam and diesel galas, A Day Out with Thomas and War on the Line. Other services include The Real Ale Train (RAT), The Watercress Belle and the Countryman Dining Trains. The Watercress Line had some 125,000 passengers in 2013 and a turnover in excess of £2.25m.

Further information

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