Welsh Princes' castle to be opened up to the people thanks to £4.7m HLF grant

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With 72 percent of tourists claiming to visit Wales for its Castles, Historic Sites and Stately Homes (PDF, 223KB) alone, the opening of Cardigan Castle to visitors will be a welcome addition to Wales' tourism offer.

Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust have been campaigning since 2001 to save the castle's 840 year history. They went into partnership with the castle owners Ceredigion County Council in 2007 in order to bid for HLF cash. They were awarded the money to carry out conservation work at the castle - a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade I listed building - and to listed buildings and the historic gardens which are all within the walls of the site.

The castle is among a handful of remaining stone castles built by Welsh princes and has strong links to well-known figures in Welsh medieval history. Dating back to the 11th century, the castle was the location of a festival hosted by Prince of Deheubarth Lord Rhys ap Gruffud in 1176, an event that has become known as the first Eisteddfod in Wales.

The castle gardens were laid out in the early 19th century and are on Cadw's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. They include a number of rare specimen trees and endangered species of bat.

Once repaired, the buildings will be used to interpret the story of the castle and provide space for wider educational and training use, as well as craft workshops and self catering holiday accommodation. Restoration of the gardens will include the croquet lawn which will interpret and celebrate the history of Eisteddfodau and be used as a self-contained events area.

The work will complement HLF's previous grants of over £1m to regenerate Cardigan through its Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), and will help to cement the town's position as a key destination for heritage-based tourism.

Chair of HLF in Wales, Dan Clayton Jones, said: "This project will make the castle created by princes fit for the people of Wales and open it up for visitors to explore. The castle will not only showcase the area's rich history, from the Princes of Deheubarth to the town's medieval walls, it will also celebrate Wales' most important and historic cultural event, the National Eisteddfod, which is thought to have begun here, in the heartland of the Welsh language."

"We've supported Cadwgan and Ceredigion County Council as part of our ongoing investment in heritage based tourism for the benefit of local people and Wales' economy. It's also going to provide fantastic opportunities for people to get involved and learn new skills to keep the town's rich heritage alive."

Welsh culture will be the focus for activities, establishing a centre for Welsh language learning and an Eisteddfod Garden to celebrate the history of Eisteddfodau. As part of the project the stable bock will be transformed into a heritage learning space for schools, students and researchers.

Nicola James, Acting Headteacher at Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi, said: "We know that history fires pupils' curiosity and imagination. This is an incredibly exciting time for our pupils as they will be able to experience at first hand the history of their own community. This will bring the town's history alive and developing their historical knowledge at such a personal and local level will enable the young people of Cardigan to have a greater understanding of their own

identities."

"In Year 7, our pupils study medieval Wales and complete an entire module of work on castles. We look forward very much to working with the Cadwgan Trust and the Heritage Learning Centre to enhance our pupils' understanding of their heritage and culture and to teach them important historical skills such as archeology."

It is hoped the creation of self-catering holiday accommodation, a visitor entrance, shop and café, and interactive exhibitions and displays will increase the number of paying visitors from 3,000 to 30,000 per year.

The grant, one of HLF's largest in Wales in recent years, will also fund the creation of 12 full time roles including an Education and Outreach Officer, Head Gardener and a Volunteer Co-ordinator to recruit up to 100 local volunteers, to build on the existing volunteer base, who will gain new skills and training through the project.

A downloadable audio trail, tour events, costumed re-enactments and events are just some of the activities planned for volunteers to help visitors get the most out of their experience. There are also plans to create a digital community archive about the Castle and the town of Cardigan.

Cadw is also supporting the project and recently announced grants totalling £400k which will help fund repairs and conservation work to the Castle and key listed buildings on the site. Further links will be made with the 'Castles and Princes' element of Cadw's European funded Heritage Tourism Project, which aims to maximise the economic value of heritage through increasing the volume, length and value of visits to Wales. Linked activities will be themed around the Princes of Deheubarth.

The Minister for Heritage, Alun Ffred Jones, said of the announcement: "I'm delighted that the HLF has now been able to offer this funding which will make such a difference in taking forward the plans for the Castle. I am pleased that my officials in Cadw have been able to offer grants for the repairs and conservation work at the Castle; this is on top of earlier funding for repairs to the monument and to Castle Green house, which have helped to keep the structures secure pending decisions on this exciting project. I'd like to applaud the hard work undertaken by the Cadwgan Trust and the local authority in their efforts to safeguard the future of the Castle and for their desire to see the Castle, which played such an important part in Welsh history, to be a meaningful part of community life in the future."

Commenting on the HLF announcement, Jann Tucker, Chair of Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust, said: "This is a significant day, not just for the preservation of one of Wales's most important historical and cultural landmarks, but also for the legacy it leaves for current and future generations to enjoy."

"We are indebted to our community and all our supporters and funders for their unstinting faith in this project and for recognizing its potential for Cardigan and West Wales. In particular, we are grateful to His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, who with The Duchess of Cornwall visited the site and who continue to offer tremendous ongoing support and enthusiasm for the Castle and its future."

"Much has been achieved and we have much more to do. The HLF grant kick starts the campaign to restore Cardigan to its rightful place in Welsh history and to the further regeneration of the wider area."

Further information

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