Funding success for Chester Farm

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The money will be used to open up the county council-owned site to the public, bringing to life thousands of years of Northamptonshire's archaeology and heritage.

It is planned that the site will become a major education and visitor destination for the county, so that everyone can benefit and learn from its heritage and history.

The Chester Farm site, near Wellingborough, provides evidence of thousands of years of settlement, from at least Mesolithic times to the present day.

The site includes traces of Iron Age enclosures and ancient field systems. Below ground there is extensive Roman settlement including a Roman walled town and recent excavation has shown that key elements of the town, such as roads, temples and other buildings, have survived. There was also medieval settlement on the site including the remains of the deserted village of Chester-by-the-Water.

The site includes a complex of farm buildings, dating from the 17th to the 20th century together with the remains of formal gardens, orchard and parkland. Extensive ironstone extraction took place in the area during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and there are the remains of an ironstone tramway across the site.

Leader of the county council, Jim Harker, said "Chester Farm is a spectacular asset that has remained unexploited for far too long. It is a heritage site of national importance, with over 2,000 years of our county's history on one site, including a complete Roman town. It is a great educational opportunity to involve the people of Northamptonshire, of all ages, in exploring and discovering their heritage, and I am so pleased that the Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised this in their award today."

Deputy leader and cabinet member for customers and communities Councillor Heather Smith said: "I am delighted that our funding bid has been successful and the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded us this money to develop Chester Farm.

"Chester Farm is a hugely-significant heritage site. This money will allow us to bring this history to life, by developing the site and opening it up to visitors so that they can learn about the county's past.

"This is the start of something big. It's a fantastic asset for the county that offers remarkable education and learning opportunities. We want everyone to know about Chester Farm as we truly believe that it could become a site of international importance."

Vanessa Harbar, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands, added her support: "HLF is absolutely delighted to be able to play its part in helping to realise the true potential of this site. Research has identified that the site is of exceptional heritage significance for its archaeological, built and natural heritage – even more than previously thought. Chester Farm will be a great resource for scholars, historians and the wider public."

The project will include:

- Site wide interpretation including Augmented Reality
- An archaeological resource centre
- Dedicated classroom facility with space for up to 70 learners
- Conference / exhibition space
- Events and activities
- Opportunities to be involved and volunteer

Northamptonshire County Council submitted the application for funding for Chester Farm earlier this year, following an initial HLF award of £135,800 to kick-off the project and carry out detailed planning to identify how the site should be developed.

The Heritage Lottery Fund recently announced new research showing that heritage-based tourism is now worth £26.4bn to the UK economy - £5.8bn higher than the previous estimate published in 2010.

Further information

Heritage Lottery Fund press office: Robert Smith on 020 7591 6245, email: roberts@hlf.org.uk.