Lottery boost for Coalhouse Fort’s future

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The project has been made possible by a grant of £790,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), and is supported by £110,000 from the Veolia North Thames Trust.

The Victorian coastal fort is owned by Thurrock Council and run entirely by volunteers. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and stands in a park with impressive natural heritage credentials.

Currently offering only restricted opening hours the fort will benefit from a new café and visitor information space in a converted generator building which will also include improved toilet facilities and a park ranger’s office.

Access improvements to two further rooms within the fort will provide space for organising activity and education programmes and also draw on nearby heritage such as the Bata conservation area in East Tilbury and the Grade I listed St Catherine’s Church. The grant also covers the cost of employing an education officer and a community development officer for more than two years.

The fort is currently listed on English Heritage’s ‘At Risk’ register and the project aims to tackle this, not only by physical improvements, but by mobilising community and volunteer interest to secure its future.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “Thurrock is an area we haven’t seen many bids from, so we are delighted to make this significant award. The historic fort, once part of our 19th-century military defence of the Thames, is now part of a wonderful riverside park. This fascinating project will work with the local community to help people learn more about the building’s past. We would be keen to hear of other people in Thurrock with ideas for heritage projects, so do get in touch.”

Charlie Curtis of the Veolia North Thames Trust said: “I’m really pleased that our trust has been able to help this project. Coalhouse Fort is a really important historic building, and it’s a fantastic place to visit. This project is going to make the visits even more enjoyable, and I’m looking forward to a celebratory cup of tea at the centre when it’s all finished!”

Cllr Cathy Kent, Thurrock Council’s representative on the Coalhouse Fort Project, said: “This is tremendous news for the fort, the local community and Thurrock as a whole. Coalhouse is one of the many little known jewels in Thurrock’s crown and this massive boost will not only help maintain and improve the fort, but also help publicise it too. I would like to thank everyone involved in the grant from the team that dealt with the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Veolia North Thames Trust for their generosity.”

Stephen Metcalfe, MP for South Basildon and East Thurrock, said: “I am delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund have seen the immense potential at Coalhouse Fort and agreed to this funding. I am particularly pleased to hear that funding has been made available for an education officer and a community development officer for more than two years. This gives the project a real chance of developing a sustainable, long term future that will benefit the local community for years to come.”

Ken Levy, Chairman of the Coalhouse Fort Project charity said: "This grant is great news and we look forward to supporting the council with this work. We hope it opens the way for future restoration of the fort itself in the future."

Further information

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