Unique Victorian ‘time capsule’ at Combe Mill to be saved

18/07/2011

The money will enable the Combe Mill Society – run entirely by passionate local volunteers – to restore and secure the long term future of the mill and run exciting ‘hands on’ education activities for the local community and visitors of all ages.

The site represents a rare time capsule of Victorian industrial and social heritage that once restored and improved for visitors has the capacity to become a star attraction for West Oxfordshire. Situated near to the Blenheim World Heritage Site, the mill dates to 1852 when it was built as a dual powered sawmill run by both water and steam. Although there is a mention of a mill at Combe in the Domesday Book, the beam engine and Cornish boiler date to the mid-19th century and are exceptional examples of their type surviving in-situ. Closed as a commercial mill in the 1950s, other contents at the site include early machinery and a blacksmith’s forge which also remain unaltered since built over 150 years ago.

David Cameron, MP for Witney, said: “Being a close neighbour of the Combe Mill site, I am delighted that this remarkable example of 19th industrial and social heritage has received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is a true ‘time capsule’ that has the capacity to become a major attraction and I commend the hard work and enthusiasm of the volunteers who have made this happen. I wish them every luck with the project and I shall be watching their progress over the coming year with interest.”

Key to the project will be greater opportunities for widening the Combe Mill story to new audiences, with school partnerships, opportunities for new volunteers to get involved in project management and construction work, family events and costume days, and activities for local adult learners all planned.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East, said: “Combe Mill at Blenheim has the potential to become a major heritage attraction. The saw mill and its surviving artefacts are truly rare examples of our fascinating industrial heritage, and when this site is restored to its former glory it will have the opportunity to offer the local community and visitors alike a real ‘Victorian experience’ to rival that of any in the UK.”

Combe Mill Society Chairman, Tony Simmons, explained the significance of the award: “We are absolutely thrilled to have this grant and are very grateful to the HLF for their confidence in our ability to carry out this important project. The enthusiasm of our visitors and the local community for the Mill to be conserved has been rewarded and we can now remedy over fifty years of neglect to secure this fascinating place for generations to come.”

The capital works to the building include repairs to the roof, windows, stonework and render, greatly improved access for all with the installation of a lift to all floors, and new catering and toilet facilities.

The museum is open Wednesday and Sunday throughout the year, and additional opening days are planned once the works are complete. The mill is in steam on the third Sunday of each month.

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project Combe Mill Restoration is for £768,000 (90% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

For more information about Combe Mill Society.

Further information

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