Spring has sprung for South Wales stately home thanks to Heritage Lottery Fund cash boost

23/03/2011

The money awarded to the Vale of Glamorgan Council will fund the restoration of the main rooms of the Grade II* listed house designed in the late-Victorian period in French Renaissance and English Baroque styles. The work will return the interiors to their former glory and open them up for visitors to enjoy for the first time since the house closed to the public in 1996.

The grant will also be used to fund the employment of an Interpretation and Learning Officer and provide a programme of training opportunities for local volunteers.

This aim is to make the three-storey mansion, built by coal tycoon John Cory in 1893 and considered to be on the of most important houses of its period, a focal point within the gardens once again and create a major tourism and community attraction.

With 80% of tourists claiming to visit South East Wales for its stately homes and castles*, the reopening of Dyffryn House will be a welcome addition to the South Wales tourism offer.

Chair of HLF in Wales, Dan Clayton-Jones, said: “Heritage-based tourism has never been so important to Wales’ economy and as such we’ve made this award as part of our continued investment in its development for the benefit of the people in Wales."

“This award is the final piece in the jigsaw of the restoration project at Dyffryn. The house is one of the most important to have survived from the period and reflects the enormous wealth amassed by John Cory, over 100 years ago. We are delighted that the HLF grant will reopen the house and reunite it once more with the gardens as it was originally designed, creating one fantastic space for visitors to enjoy. What’s more, this project is creating opportunities for local people to get involved in heritage, learn new skills and play their part in taking history into the future.”

In 1997 and 2005, HLF awarded the 55 acre Dyffryn Gardens a total of over £6.15m to restore the gardens’ features and landscapes. The gardens currently attract 52,000 visitors a year and are regularly used for events. The council hopes the reopening of the house will double visitor numbers within 10 years.

The Minister for Heritage, Alun Ffred Jones, said: “I’m delighted that my officials in Cadw were able to offer a grant in 2009 towards the restoration of the principal rooms and I am glad that they and the HLF are able to work together in this way so that the public will once again be able to access this magnificent house. Training opportunities for local volunteers is something to be welcomed and will enhance the community’s understanding of Dyffryn House and Gardens and the stories surrounding it, and will also enhance a visitor’s experience to this prime attraction.”

There is currently a regular 25-strong group of committed garden volunteers, and over 300 members of the Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Society. The council wants to build on this to help visitors make the most of their experience. Local people of all ages are being encouraged to get involved in a variety of roles such as researchers, period flower arrangers and tour guides in full Edwardian costume, to really bring the history of the house to life.

The work is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2012 and a series of events, activities, exhibitions and school visits are planned to take place.

Councillor Rhodri Traherne, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, said: “Bringing the house back into use as part of the visitor experience at Dyffryn will be a significant development in making this an important heritage destination, benefiting not only Dyffryn but the region as a whole. We look forward to opening our doors to the public in 2012.”

Geraldine Donovan, Site Curator, added: “Throughout the restoration there will be opportunities for the community to become involved either as volunteers or as observers of the project. Our first volunteer open day is 5 May and, from the interest expressed so far by both friends and the community, we are confident that we will attract the new house volunteers which are essential to the project’s success.”

Further information

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