

Farnham Castle to be restored

25/09/2009

The grant will complete the final phase of a major restoration programme and unite the Bishop's Palace and Keep under single management for the first time. This will enable it as one of the leading tourist attractions in the South to offer an exciting and educational visitor experience, and open up the castle's rich and varied stories to the widest possible audience.

In constant use for the past 900 years, Farnham Castle was built in 1138 by a grandson of William the Conqueror. It has played host to monarchs throughout the ages from King John to Queen Victoria. As a political powerhouse for 800 years under the Bishops of Winchester, who used the Castle as a home and administrative centre until the 1920's, much of the original fabric and layout of the Grade I and II listed site survives in a form that has evolved gradually over time. Farnham Castle's national heritage significance is recognised through its designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Jane Weeks, Chair of the South East England HLF Committee, said: "We are delighted to see this many-faceted project come to fruition. It will repair and conserve one of the few remaining medieval houses of England and introduce new audiences to a long and fascinating history that has something to offer all age groups of local and visiting communities alike."

South West Surrey MP Jeremy Hunt has also spoken of his delight at the news that Farnham Castle is to receive the much needed funding it has been fighting for from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Jeremy said: "I have been supporting Farnham Castle throughout their campaign to secure funding for the much needed restoration of this magnificent castle. It has been a long fight but this is a brilliant conclusion. A newly refurbished castle will attract more people to the town and other traders can look forward to benefiting."

At the heart of the project, due to start next month and scheduled for completion by Spring 2010, will be improved access to the Keep for everyone. Farnham Castle will take over responsibility for running the Keep from English Heritage, alongside continuing to manage the Bishop's Palace, enabling a cohesive vision for the castle's restoration and visitor development plan. Entry will be free for all visitors, and opening times will increase from the current 80 days to 300 days per year, 8 hours per day.

It is hoped that an exciting and varied learning and activities programme will increase visitor numbers (currently 18,500 per year at the castle and 4,500 per year at the keep) so that the local community and visitors alike can fully experience the unique history of the castle. There will be benefits for a wide range of people, including volunteers, students, schools and visitors, in addition to jobs and training for a range of local people, including an Education Officer, architects, building conservation contractors, apprentice stonemasons and students.

Capital works to be fulfilled by the grant include:

Bishop's Palace

Completion of much needed restoration work on the main palace building to include the castle walls, Grade II listed stable block, gatehouse block, and the south range.

The Keep

- Fabric and facilities will be much improved to include a programme of urgent repair and safety works in anticipation of increased visitor numbers.
- The historic well display at the heart of the Keep will be vastly improved with the removal of a 150sq metre 1950's concrete slab, which will be replaced with grass. A new stairway and viewing platform inside the illuminated well will be covered by a 'traditional oak cupola'.
- Safety will be improved with the railings at high points on the Keep being replaced.
- New interpretation boards explaining the history of the Keep will be placed at relevant points including an interactive audio presentation board at the entrance to allow disabled visitors to share the experience.

A major new activities programme involving many individuals in the local community, will also encourage learning and participation in the unique history of the castle. Highlights capitalising on the castle's rich history include:

- A Heritage in Action room – to be created as a joint project with Farnham's University of Creative Arts exploring the castle's nine centuries through paintings, hands-on exhibits, interactive displays, models and photographs. This room will also provide refreshments for visitors to the keep.
- A Camouflage and Illusion project - to be run jointly by Farnham Maltings, Farnham Castle and Farnham Museum, with help from the Imperial War Museum, will be created in recognition of the castle's Second World War role as the Training and Development Centre for Camouflage. The historical evidence will also be used as inspiration for creating a new piece of theatre which will be staged in the grounds of the castle. Actors and backstage crew, in particular young adults, will be chosen from members of the local community.
- A series of one-day courses in stonework repair will be held as the conservation work gets underway and one or two construction industry students from Farnham will be offered the chance to be apprenticed to the castle's stonemasons.
- A refreshed weekend events programme will include Civil War re-enactments by the Sealed Knot and a series of public lectures will detail the role of the castle within the history of the town and its surrounding area. This will see a large living history civil war encampment set up in the castle grounds, which will help bring history alive. Visitors can talk to major historical figures, try out a few recipes and learn about the life of a soldier on the march. Children will learn about the period with a little 'hands-on' experience. The display will culminate in a re-enactment of the storming of the gatehouse!
- Local school pupils will also benefit from a revitalised learning programme in conjunction with English Heritage.

Lucinda Fleming, Mayor of Farnham, commented: "This is an amazing opportunity for the town and its residents, and I am particularly pleased to learn that many of the planned activities will involve so many members of our local community. The castle and the town are extremely grateful to those who have contributed to the project and I would actively encourage anyone who would like to make a contribution financial or otherwise to do so."

Karen Richardson, Estates Surveyor for English Heritage in the South East, said: "English Heritage is absolutely delighted that Farnham Castle's bid to the HLF to conserve the Keep and generally upgrade the site has now been successful. We gave this grant application our full backing and we look forward to working with Chief Executive James Twiss on plans to secure the future management of the site which could include opening 300 days a year."

James Twiss, Chief Executive, Farnham Castle, said: "This is fantastic news for Farnham Castle and for everyone who lives around here as well as the many visitors to the town."

He continued: "We have received an amazing amount of support from many local organisations, and in addition to the very generous grant now confirmed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and our own funds, we have received pledges from Waverley Borough Council, Farnham Mayor's Appeal, Farnham Institute,

Farnham Historic Buildings Preservation Trust, Farnham Institute, The Maltings and English Heritage. We are almost there and with further help, which I am sure will be forthcoming now we have a positive outcome to the HLF application, the project will be fully funded.”

Notes to editors

The HLF grant to the project The Keep and Castle Conservation at Farnham Castle is for £707,300 (79% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Further information

Vicky Wilford, HLF Press Office on 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401937 or vickyw@hlf.org.uk

James Twiss, Farnham Castle on 01252 721 194 or jtwiss@farnhamcastle.com / www.farnhamcastle.com