Fort Bovisand regeneration project secures Lottery support

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Development funding of £352,500 has been awarded to help the Fort Bovisand Trust progress their proposed plans to the next stage but, if all goes well, this could lead to a further £4.32million grant to help renovate the whole site, as part of a £16million public / private project.

With this award, the development work can now proceed to completion by mid-2014, and, following final HLF approval on the full grant, renovation work is anticipated to start in 2015. The leasehold on the site currently belongs to Fort Bovisand Development Ltd, a company wholly owned by Greg Dyke, the former Director-General of the BBC.

In December, the Fort Bovisand Trust submitted an updated application for a grant from the HLF. The delivery of a visitors' interpretation centre / café and learning facilities form part of the current owner's wider £16million+ redevelopment proposals for the whole of the scheduled ancient monument site, which overlooks Plymouth Harbour and the Breakwater. HLF has given the project the thumbs up with approval for further detailed development work on project plans to be conducted with their backing and funding support.

The centre will outline the role the fort has played in the defence of Plymouth over the centuries, and provide learning venues and opportunities for engagement with local schools / colleges. The new centre will tell the story of Fort Bovisand from the time it first featured in Plymouth's defence, as a fort in Tudor times, through to its role in the Second World War, when it was manned by servicemen with anti-aircraft guns and searchlights, and helped guide British ships through the defensive minefields laid to protect the port of Plymouth.

The centre will also explain the role of Fort Bovisand as one of a network of Palmerston forts built in the 1860s aimed at deterring an invasion by the French, and its more recent history as probably the major diving centre in Britain, where divers from both the armed forces and commercial diving operations trained over the years, producing significant numbers for such as North Sea exploration.

As part of the forthcoming development and renovation work, the conservation and re-use of the whole site will aim to attract people to learn about the past and to develop new skills. Recreating its history and building on its past, the centre will provide a valuable resource for young people and future generations. The project plans to engage with local education groups, using a strong participation-led approach to enhance the artisan skill base in the area, engaging young people in working in an historic environment. As part of this approach, the trust has had initial discussions with a group of premier Plymouth educational establishments, the Conservation Volunteers and the City Museum, aimed at delivering partnering arrangements to engage with apprentices, volunteers and students.

Plymouth City Council Leader, Councillor Tudor Evans, said: "Another great project on the horizon – almost literally – for Plymouth. This plan all helps add to the sense that Plymouth's time is really coming. Bovisand has had an interesting history and we look forward to seeing it become part of Plymouth's future visitor offer. There's no doubt that these are big and ambitious ideas that have enormous potential to open up yet another part of Plymouth's waterfront and heritage."

South Hams District Council Leader, Councillor John Tucker, said: “The council warmly welcomes the outline proposals to restore Fort Bovisand. We look forward to continuing discussions that lead to a scheme which is sensitive to this historic monument.”

Julie Fellows, Director of Marine Specialism at the Marine Academy Plymouth, said: ”We have been speaking to the trust to examine ways we can work together to utilise this fantastic venue and the facilities that Fort Bovisand will deliver once renovated. This project also represents an amazing opportunity for our students to better understand the importance of Plymouth’s maritime history, which informs our past and inspires our future. We are extremely positive about the future plans and look forward to working closely with the trust as plans develop.”

Mr Dyke said: “I have owned a long leasehold on Fort Bovisand for a few years now and, over the past couple of years, we have been looking in detail at all sorts of ways we could restore the fort and turn it into a visitor attraction and an educational centre. We now believe that, by converting part of the fort into residences, and delivering the remainder as an interpretation centre and learning resource and in handing the whole site over to a charitable trust, we can, if the trust gets the full HLF grant, bring the whole fort back from the dead. Today’s news is very exciting”.

“There’s still a lot of work to be done and a lot of permissions to be got but, in principle, English Heritage, South Hams District Council and Plymouth City Council are all keen to see this derelict fort renovated and have an exciting future as a visitor attraction and place of learning. The impact of a £16million-plus project on the economy of the area will also be significant, at a time when the region is in great need of public / private partnerships to help kick start the recovery in the region; the experts tell us this will generate some £40million worth of economic activity in the local area, which will be absolutely terrific.”

Chief Executive of the Fort Bovisand Trust, Philip Beagle, explained that he hoped the centre would help bring the fort’s history to life and ensure its preservation as a heritage asset into the future: “The charitable trust has been set up to manage the Lottery bid and the fort into the future. We believe we can turn the fort into an exciting centre - everyone we have talked to in the educational, visitor attraction and heritage fields have been very enthusiastic about the project. If we can do this we believe the centre will become a ‘must-go’ visit for school children in this region wanting to learn about their heritage” said Mr Beagle.

“There is particular excitement about the idea of using the fort to explain the history of Plymouth in the Second World War, an area of local history that is currently not adequately covered, and in the potential for young people getting involved in the renovation, potentially learning new – or should I say, old – skills that will be of value to them and to the area in the future. Now the hard work really starts, but we’re up to the challenge” assured Mr Beagle.

The fort has been largely unoccupied and unused for more than two decades and, as a result, is now high up on English Heritage’s Heritage at Risk Register. Phil McMahon, Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage, said: “English Heritage welcomes the news that funding will be available for the Fort Bovisand Trust to further develop their plans to agreement and hopefully receive full funding to save this nationally important heritage site. Fort Bovisand is currently at risk and we support the principle of adaptive re-use for such sites where it can be achieved, whilst preserving and enhancing those qualities that make the fort so significant.”

Notes to editors

The Fort Bovisand Trust was set up in 2011 to manage the development of the HLF application and subsequently to manage any award and the future running of the whole site into the future. As part of this package, the current leasehold will be transferred to the trust to allow it to benefit from the income derived from ground and business rents and from

income generated from the activities of the centre, the shop, and gate receipts. This provides a sound business model to ensure a sustainable future for the whole site into the future.

Further information

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