Fortunes turn for Lews Castle

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Sitting in a commanding position overlooking Stornoway, Lews Castle has been awarded development funding of £240,000 and a first-round pass* for a £2.6m HLF bid.

Currently vacant and on the Buildings at Risk Register, the Castle was built in 1847 for James Matheson who had bought in the island with the fortune he made in the Chinese opium trade. It changed hands in 1918, a year before the Iolaire disaster, when William Lever, Lord Leverhulme, of Lever Brothers/Unilever acquired the island. He invested in the castle introducing central heating, electric lighting and internal telephones and extended the ballroom to accommodate his parties. He then gifted it to the people of Stornoway in 1923.

During World War II it served as a naval hospital and accommodation for the air and ground crew of 700 Naval Air Squadron who operated a detachment of amphibious bi-planes from a slipway in the grounds

Plans are to restore the castle to create a modern museum with an archive facility alongside a commercially operated hospitality venture. With enhanced learning services and education staff the new museum service will be able to increase support to the very active community heritage sector of over 20 historical societies throughout the Outer Hebrides

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: “This project has the potential to make a real difference to the economy of Lewis and indeed the Western Isles through job creation and tourism. Breathing new life into this magnificent castle will breathe new life into Stornoway itself, and provide support to the network of heritage societies and local museums that exist across the Hebrides. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to be able to give its support."

Welcoming the HLF announcement, Angus Campbell, the Council Leader and Chairman of the Lews Castle Trust Steering Group, said: "This is great news and a real morale boost for the whole community. It is gratifying that in a very competitive funding environment HLF have seen the value and the potential of restoring Lews Castle, bringing it back to life and making it accessible to everyone.

"It’s been a great partnership effort to take the project to this stage and although there is still a lot of work to be done, the support of HLF will be crucial in raising the rest of the funding needed to bring this long-awaited project to fruition."

The Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting the economy of the Western Isles through other projects such as the Stornoway Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Notes to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

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