Heritage Lottery Fund helps canal tunnel project set sail

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Development funding of £118,000 has been awarded by HLF to help progress the plans. The first-round pass* means that the trust can now progress to the second stage of the HLF application process.

It is expected to take up to 18 months to carry out investigations of the site, conduct consultations with the public and partner organisations, and to produce detailed plans. The balance of the total estimated cost of £211,000 for the planning work is to be covered by the Dudley Canal Trust, along with a feasibility grant of £10,000 from Dudley Council. Applications for funding to build and operate the Hub, expected to cost in the region of £3.5 million, will then be made to a number of potential funders including a second-round application to HLF for the full grant of £737,300.

The Hub, which will be located at the Trust's operating base alongside the Birmingham New Road in Tipton, will help to enhance visitor experience to the site and the various attractions around Castle Hill. It will also offer exciting opportunities for people to get involved and to learn about the area's internationally significant heritage. In addition to Dudley Canal Tunnel and Limestone Mines, nearby attractions include Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, the Black Country Living Museum, and Dudley Castle and Zoo.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the West Midlands, said: "We are delighted to be able to offer initial support to the Dudley Canal Trust for this exciting project which aims to greatly improve the experience people will have when visiting the tunnel and mines. Whilst this is just the beginning of the journey, the award of this development money will enable the applicant to work up their plans for a full grant in the future."

Dudley Canal Trust currently welcomes over 80,000 visitors a year to explore the Canal Tunnel and Limestone Caverns under Castle Hill. Managed and operated by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers the canal tunnel offers a trip back in time and the chance to learn about the Black Country of the 19th century and the history and formation of limestone and fossils within the tunnel. In addition to accommodating a growth in visitor numbers, the Learning and Access Hub will also celebrate the role of the Birmingham Canal Navigations in the Industrial Revolution and its positive impact on the Black Country and the wider region.

Mike Duley, Chairman of the Project Steering Group, explained: "Dudley Canal Trust has a long-term mission to protect the heritage treasure that lies largely hidden from view beneath Castle Hill and to increase public access and awareness of its international significance. It's fantastic news to have the funding we need to develop plans for this scheme, great to have an endorsement of this concept from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a credit to all who have helped us to pursue this idea over recent years."

To receive regular updates about the project and follow link to the **Support our Learning and Access Hub** tab or signing the project supporters' book at the boat-trip ticket office.

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 more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £319million to projects in the West Midlands alone.

Further information

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