Heritage Lottery Funding for Colchester Castle, Essex

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has given the green light to Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service to work up plans to reinterpret and re-display Colchester Castle, Essex, it was announced today. Stage one development funding of £265,300 has been awarded to help progress the plans.

Colchester Castle is one the UK's finest surviving Norman buildings and shares a ground plan, and possibly the same architect, with the White Tower in London. The castle's museum, a popular local attraction, tells the story of the early development of Colchester, Roman Britain's first capital, and is particularly important for its collections of Iron Age and early Roman finds from Colchester and Essex. Urgently in need of refurbishment to update both the building and its displays, HLF's initial support means that the museum can now take the next steps towards achieving this transformational project.

The HLF first-round pass* means that Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service can now progress to the second stage of the HLF application process. They have up to two years to submit more detailed plans and apply for the £1.6million of HLF support that they are seeking for their estimated £2.9 million overall project.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “The first-round pass is an important step towards the future development of Colchester Castle Museum. Alongside safeguarding the internationally important museum collection, the planned transformation will enable the museum to tell the story of Colchester from the archaeological discoveries detailing the Roman Circus to present day role as a garrison town. Although this announcement does not guarantee that at second-round an award will be made, HLF will offer the museum service full support in taking their application further.”

Colchester Castle Museum houses one of the most outstanding archaeology collections in Britain and the Castle itself is one of the most significant historic buildings in Britain. The project’s main aims include: to improve the interpretation of Colchester Castle as a building itself, which has been highlighted as a weakness by visitors. In addition, to present the history of Colchester in a series of exciting new displays that increase visitors’ understanding and enjoyment and to incorporate the latest archaeological discoveries (such as the Roman Circus and town walls) into the displays.

The project will build in flexibility allowing future changes to the main displays in the light of any new discoveries. The project’s aim overall is to improve the quality of the visitor experience in line with people’s expectations of a major visitor attraction. There is also a very practical element to the project which is to run some repairs to the roof and upgrade the heating system in such a way that the building works are an example of best practice in integrating the requirements of conservation and the environment in a historic building.

These aims will be achieved by working with the local community, museum users and visitors, giving them the opportunity to be involved in the development and decision making on this project.

Commenting on the award, Peter Berridge, Museums Manager, said: “We are so delighted with the news - this first round pass enables us to move forward into phase two of our plans to develop the Castle, its collections, stories and

visitors' facilities with the ultimate aim to increase and build on the high-quality experience we offer and further improving and providing a top-quality experience for our audiences."

Cllr Paul Smith, Culture and Diversity Portfolio Holder, Colchester Borough Council, said: "This is exciting news and a testament to Colchester Borough Council and its commitment to investing in its heritage. This project is about true community involvement that will shape the way we present and enable access to our past for all. This will also further enhance the quality of our heritage attraction in the town and what Colchester has to offer as a tourist destination."

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.

On occasion an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

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 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK.

Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service vision is to create a museum service that is a source of pride, inspiration and fun.

Further information

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