Maidstone Museum’s major boost from Heritage Lottery Fund

13/10/2009

It is one of South-East England’s most important local museums with impressive visitor numbers and a vast collection of artefacts. Now Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery has been awarded a grant of almost £2 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to enable the next stage of its development to get underway.

The museum and its associated art gallery has a large collection of 660,000 objects. These range from a 2,700-year-old Eqyptian mummy, the chair used by Napoleon Bonaparte during his exile on St Helena, stone age tools up to 400,000 years old and other archaeological finds dating from the Bronze and Iron ages, and Roman and Saxon times.

There are 40 old master drawings, bronzes by Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore and rare Japanese woodcut prints, including the famous image Great Wave off Kanagawa by Hokasai.

Maidstone Borough Council’s Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, Councillor Brian Moss, said: “The Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised the regional importance of Maidstone’s museum and the innovative design which will attract visitors from far and near. The improvements to display space will ensure a visit is exciting for the whole family. The educational suite will improve and increase the facilities for schools visits and this extra space will allow more exhibitions and talks for those of all ages. We are delighted that this project part of our regeneration ambition for Maidstone will now quickly push ahead.”

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England Stuart McLeod, said: “ This project will help the museum go from strength to strength, enabling it to put much more of its extensive collection on public display. It will also allow an increase in its learning facilities which are currently operating at full capacity.”

The East Wing project will create a new museum entrance, improve visitor facilities, upgrade internal exhibition spaces and provide better storage areas. A new education suite will enhance the museum’s learning facilities and, for the first time, there will be level wheelchair access to the galleries.

The redevelopment plans will create 30% more display space in the East Wing enabling the museum to display much more of its vast collections than at present and will help swell audience numbers from the current annual total of more than 80,000 to an anticipated 120,000 by 2012. The work will also refurbish and rationalise the museum stores so that collection storage and conservation can be improved.

Maidstone Museum opened in 1858 making it one of the earliest town museums in the country. Part of it is housed in a Grade II listed Tudor mansion including a great hall that dates from 1564 and an even earlier cloister. The buildings have been extended a number of times and much of the present structure is Victorian.

Work on the latest redevelopment is due to begin in March next year and be completed in July 2011.

Notes to editors

HLF gave a grant of £407,500 to the Museum for work to the West Wing which was completed in 2003. The grant for

the East Wing Project is £1,999,000.

This year HLF is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 it has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded over £378 million to more than 2,660 projects in South East England.

Further information

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