# Heritage Lottery Fund gives Wales' tourism economy a £2.2m boost

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Work has already started on safeguarding the Grade I listed 12th century Oystermouth Castle, Mumbles and conserving the landscape and culture at Blaenavon's World Heritage Site.

The money will be used to support improvements to the overall visitor experience and will help attract more tourists to the sites whilst creating opportunities for volunteers. It forms part of HLF's continued investment in developing Wales' tourism economy.

According to Visit Wales, heritage sites and experiences make a significant contribution to the £3billion worth of tourism spend in Wales annually, which equates to around £8million a day and supports the 100,000 jobs either directly or indirectly associated with tourism. Natural attractions, castles and historic sites are the top attractions visited by 72 per cent of visitors staying in Wales in 2009.

Jennifer Stewart, commented: "Wales is home to a wealth of heritage attractions which visitors flock to from across the world each year. From castles and museums to landscapes and wildlife, our heritage is what makes Wales unique. Heritage-based tourism has never been more important to Wales' economy and as such we continue to invest in its development for the benefit of the people in Wales.

"Fundamental to the success of heritage attractions is the experience it offers the visitor. We've supported these two projects as they are focussed on making the heritage relevant for tourists and communities alike to enjoy through improved access and better interpretation. They also both offer fantastic opportunities for volunteers to get actively involved, so not only will these important sites be safeguarded but also the skills needed to maintain them for the future."

Four local contractors have been commissioned to carry out the building work and apprentice schemes will be offered to help build a heritage-skilled workforce in Wales.

Heritage Minister, Alun Ffred Jones, commented: "I welcome this funding and the benefits it will bring to these two heritage sites. Both projects will generate employment opportunities for the local community and attract further investment to boost their region's well established tourism industry."

**Oystermouth Castle, Mumbles**
HLF has awarded Swansea County Council £764,000 to conserve and enhance the Grade I listed Ancient Scheduled Monument, Oystermouth Castle.

Founded by William de Londres in the early 12th century, its origins are in the Norman conquest of Wales and it has visible remains from the 12th up to the early 14th century. Its compact size and relative completeness means that visitors can easily explore the site.

However, the castle has fallen into disrepair with approximately 50 per cent currently closed off to visitors. In a 2003 report, Cadw assessed Oystermouth as the castle in the worst condition of those that were open to the public in Wales

and concluded that restoration work was critical in order to avoid its inevitable closure.

With the support of HLF, conservation work is now underway on the historic building and a new indoor interpretation centre is being built within the disused chapel block which will provide hands-on experiences for visitors. The aim is to give visitors access to 95 per cent of the castle and increase visitor numbers from 4,500 to 20,000 per year.

As part of the Oystermouth Castle project, the City and County of Swansea has implemented its Beyond Bricks and Mortar Policy, which encourages training and employment opportunities where public money is being invested to further develop economic opportunities within Swansea.

Llanelli-based WRW Contractors won the contract to complete the conservation work and will provide approximately four apprentice placements primarily sourced through the West Workway's project, which engages with the unemployed and economically inactive. Paul Bowen, WRW Project Manager, said: "It's fantastic to be working on such a major project in the local area, it's great for business and, on a personal level I'm really keen to help secure this significant landmark for the future.

"This scheme, which is part conservation and part new build, requires a variety of traditional skills. Currently there is a real shortage of these skills, such as stone masonry so this will provide an opportunity to train a local apprentice with the skills they need to secure a job in the future."

Key to the success of the project is the continued active involvement of community groups and committed volunteers, in particular the Friends of Oystermouth Castle (FOC), a 24 strong group of committed volunteers who manage the day-to-day running of the castle. The project will fund the employment of a Castle Community Coordinator to help build on the enthusiasm and knowledge of existing volunteers and expand the programme offered to the wider community in roles such as tour guides.

Tourism in Gower generates £83million with 1,700 people employed in the tourism industry*, and the money generated by tourism across Swansea reaching £300million**. Cllr Graham Thomas, Swansea Council's Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism, said: "It's vital we look to the future in Swansea but it's equally important we celebrate our proud heritage and this is why schemes of this nature should be welcomed.

"Oystermouth Castle is one of our historical gems and this scheme means the attraction will be conserved for future generations and will offer a visitor experience that's befitting of the 21st Century.

"It's also encouraging that local contractors have been appointed to lead the scheme and this will mean jobs for local people in this tough economic climate."

**Blaenavon Forgotten Landscapes**

The Forgotten Landscapes Partnership is using its £1,474,000 HLF grant to conserve red grouse and heather moorland, and return Welsh ponies to the outstanding landscape around Blaenavon's World Heritage Site.

The Forgotten Landscapes project is the final piece in the jigsaw of Blaenavon's regeneration and will enhance further promotion of the site whilst safeguarding its historic character. The aim is for the landscape to act as a stepping stone into the Valleys Regional Park and a gateway to Valleys tourism.

The site contains a wealth of built and industrial heritage, boasting 17 scheduled ancient monuments and 109 listed buildings. Many of the features of interest are currently hidden but as part of this project, work has already started on

the restoration of archaeological features, such as the Pwll Du Tramway tunnel which was used to transport coal, limestone and pig iron between Valleys.

Abergavenny-based contractors Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd is carrying out the work using a local work force. The project requires a range of traditional skills from stone masonry to carpentry. The company has benefited from a surge in heritage projects and as such has developed a team with the necessary skills. Brian Barnard has been working in the area as a stone mason for almost 40 years and is working on preserving key stonework including the culvert and dam at Keeper's Pond, which were both in need of repair.

Brian said: "It's great to be working on a project which is going to benefit the local community for years to come. I find working on heritage projects really interesting, because it's different from the day-to-day work of building retaining walls and I feel like I'm playing a part in making a difference.

"Seeing local people working together to preserve the area is really refreshing.Visitors will no longer just walk past parts of history unaware of what they are missing, as the little monuments, as I like to call them, that are dotted around the countryside will be back in perfect condition and interpreted for them."

A key aim of the project is to engage local people to conserve the distinct heritage of the landscape and create an extensive volunteer workforce to help locals and visitors make the most of their experience of the landscape. It is hoped 50 volunteers will be trained to undertake land management, conduct surveys and monitoring as well as act as interpretative walking guides. HLF funding will support the employment of a dedicated staff team of six including Education and Interpretation Officers to develop and implement these opportunities.

In excess of 50,000 visitors use the Keepers Pond car park at Blaenavon every year as a base for exploring the area, highlighting the popularity of the site. The most popular walking trail, the Coity Tip Trail, shows a consistent year-on-year increase with 21,300 visitors in 2008, a 52 per cent increase in-line with the increased visitors to the Pontypool and Blaenavon railway site.

Torfaen welcomes 896,000 visitors a year to the area as a whole, which contributes £48.4 million to the local economy and is estimated to support 852 jobs.***

Torfaen County Borough Council is the lead partner for the Forgotten Landscapes Partnership. Torfaen Council leader Bob Wellington, added: "I am delighted that this project to moving forward so successfully, and look forward to seeing it continue its excellent progress, helping to ensure that visitors and local people can fully appreciate, understand and access Blaenavon's fascinating global heritage."

**Notes to editors**

*Figures specifically relate to the 2006/2007 financial year.
** Figure taken from 2008/9 report.
*** Figures taken from Torfaen STEAM report for 2008.

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.

**HLF UK Tourism Figures:**

• Four in 10 leisure visitors cite heritage as the main motivation for their trip to the UK – more than any other single factor.
• 53% of the population make a trip to experience the atmosphere of a historic town or city at least once a year.
• 42% visit a museum or gallery.
• The total number of visits to museums and galleries has been estimated at over 40 million a year.
• 1.2 billion visits are made to the countryside.
• Over 10 million visits are made to historic park.
• More than 38 million to historic houses, cathedrals and castles.
• More than 250 million to Britain's inland canals and waterways.
• Historic houses in private ownership play a crucial part in supporting 14 million visitors each year.
• The size of the UK heritage-tourism sector (including natural heritage) is in excess of £12.4billion a year and supports an estimated 195,000 full-time-equivalent jobs – this makes the sector bigger than the advertising, car or film industries.
• The relative importance of domestic tourism is clear – £7.5billion worth of expenditure, or 60% of the total, is spent by UK residents making day trips and taking holidays in the UK.

**Further information**

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