Walsall’s Barr Beacon War Memorial to be fully restored – thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund

23/03/2012

The three-year project - to be run by Walsall Council in partnership with owners the Barr Beacon Trust - aims to reinstate the well known landmark as a shining beacon of community pride with a full restoration of the site’s heritage features – including a rare design of flagpole, an historic tree plantation, and its landmark war memorial.

The monument will be restored and re-dedicated as a memorial to servicemen and women throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, while the grant funding will also play an important role in bringing the site to life as a valued community resource for Walsall. The project will see more activities on offer for visitors, schools and colleges including wildlife walks and fun days, a Time Team-style archaeological dig, astronomy events and services of Remembrance, while a Community Liaison Officer will be put in post to encourage positive use of Barr Beacon and help ensure a lasting legacy beyond the lifetime of the project.

Barr Beacon is one of the highest points in the West Midlands, boasting views on a clear day that can stretch from Wales and Shropshire in the west and Staffordshire in the north, to Warwickshire in the east and Birmingham in the south and beyond. Mentioned in the Doomsday Book, it has been a site for community celebration for centuries, with beacon fires lit to mark historic milestones such as Sir Francis Drake’s defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and again in 1988 for the 400th anniversary of the event. In 1918 the site was gifted to the community by Lieutenant Colonel Wilkinson who purchased Barr Beacon after the break up of the Great Barr Hall Estate, and in 1933 a monument was erected in his memory and as a permanent memorial to those from Staffordshire and Warwickshire who lost their lives during the First World War.

Sadly, Barr Beacon’s recent history has been less favourable, as the war memorial has been repeatedly targeted by metal thieves who have stripped the copper dome off the much-loved monument. Now, a new partnership between the War Memorials Trust and the SmartWater Foundation called In Memoriam 2014 is planning to forensically mark the metal plaques of all memorials around the UK with SmartWater – an invisible liquid which can only be seen under UV light. Walsall Council is part of this scheme in which metal plaques on war memorials throughout the borough will be forensically marked in a bid to stem the rising tide of thefts.

The Raising the Barr project also aims to bring Barr Beacon into the 21st century with the development of a dedicated Smartphone App, Facebook page and Twitter feed so people of all ages can keep up with developments.

Councillor Adrian Andrew, Chair of the Barr Beacon Trust explained further: “This is a fantastic day for everyone who cares about Barr Beacon’s rich past and its exciting future. The In Memoriam 2014 scheme is helping us to tackle the thoughtless minority who want to spoil this landmark and insult the memories of servicemen and women it honours. We’re delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this grant for such an important project as we work with the community to preserve Barr Beacon and ensure it will be enjoyed by future generations throughout the borough.”

Reyahn King, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands added: “This exciting project will restore the memorial and its surrounds, providing greater access to the historic plantation and improved signage on site as well as educational materials. I’m delighted that HLF can support this project and create greater public awareness of the special

role the Barr Beacon plays in its community."

Support for the project is also especially strong amongst the community who use the site. Sharon Froggatt, manager of the nearby Collingwood Centre in Pheasey Park Farm works in partnership with the Trust and other organisations to support and promote Barr Beacon.

She said: "We're thrilled that Barr Beacon's bid has been successful. It gives us all so many opportunities to build on existing community pride and spread the word far and wide about what a wonderful asset it is."

Finally, Councillor Anthony Harris, Walsall Council cabinet member for leisure and culture, added: "To receive this boost during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year is very fitting as Walsall now has even more reason to celebrate."

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project 'Raising the Barr' – the restoration of Barr Beacon's historic features and community pride is for £440,900 (64% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Further information

Interviews and images

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