What goes around comes around

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It is little-known that the Ayrshire village of Catrine is home to a unique renewable power system dating from 1787. It consists of a weir, five reservoirs known locally as “Voes”, a sluice gate, a fish pass and a 450-metres long tunnel. The scale and engineering was considered state-of-the-art at the time, and the system is now designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The weir has, however, has deteriorated to a critical level and the risk of loss is now imminent with sections in partial collapse or in danger of being washed down the river.

The Catrine water system was constructed by landowner, Claud Alexander and textiles entrepreneur, David Dale as part of a cotton mill complex. Water from the River Ayr fell over a 15 metre drop above the mill, powering four waterwheels. When a bleaching works was added in 1827 the entire manufacturing process from raw cotton to finished goods took place on the one site. In 1828, two breast-shot wheels, fifty feet in diameter were added to service the additional demands of the mill. At the time and for many years thereafter the wheels, known as the ‘Lions of Catrine’, were the most powerful in the world and became a tourist attraction in their own right. They were dismantled in the 1940s as part of a post-war modernisation plan.

As well as its industrial links Catrine sits in beautiful countryside which attracts walkers, fishermen and bird watchers. There is a rich biodiversity in the River Ayr including otters and migratory salmon. The poor condition of the fish pass and the significant deterioration of the Voes are having a detrimental effect on this natural heritage.

The Heritage Lottery funding announced today completes the major funding package that includes the conservation of the weir using pioneering techniques, the upgrading of a redundant chapel to create a new Community Education and Visitor Interpretation Centre and a new Community Enterprise Centre based in an adjoining Victorian villa. This element of the project will encourage the wider local community to learn about their heritage and contribute to the way it is interpreted with over 2,000 school children and 500 adults expected to participate.

Big Lottery is funding environmental improvements around the nature reserve centred on Catrine Voes and Cumnock and Doon Valley Minerals Trust have made possible the signing of a 99 year lease on the hydro infrastructure that was not passed to the Trust with the remainder of the historic water system. The 1950s hydro scheme will be restored using private finance and the resultant income will be used to maintain the water system and sustain the visitor centre. It will be an important feature of Catrine Community Powerdown, a carbon footprint reduction programme which has over the last two years helped produce massive savings of 1536 tonnes of CO2 through awareness events and working with the local schools in the Catrine community.

Environment Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: “I am pleased to see the Catrine water system being restored as it brings so many benefits to the area. It’s a fine example of Scotland’s industrial heritage that the local community can be proud of and will also help protect the rich biodiversity that fill the river and the surrounding countryside.”

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: “For almost 200 years, the Catrine Water System was central to the biodiversity and social history of the area as it brought with it jobs, housing and economic prosperity. This project demonstrates how history can be a living part of a modern community bringing people together to learn from, enjoy and benefit from their shared past. We recognise this community’s passion and commitment to seeing their

village regenerated through a celebration of its heritage and are delighted to give them our full support.”

Stuart Nelson, Chair of Catrine Community Trust, said: “The Community Trust and its supporters have worked tirelessly over the last five years in building the case for funding to save Catrine’s amazing industrial heritage and provide much-needed facilities to convey this to the many people who pass though the village on the River Ayr Way. This generous award virtually completes the £4m funding package that once seemed very far away and provides a much-needed boost to the capacity of the Trust to regenerate the village and provide employment.”

Notes to editors

*The breast shot wheels are no longer in existence so will not be restored as part of the project.

The current village of Catrine began in 1787 when Claude Alexander and David Dale, from New Lanark, saw the potential of the natural resources and build a water-powered cotton mill there. The village was laid out along a central axis with the industrial buildings forming the centrepiece of the main square. Alexander and Dale built the village to house the workers, adding to it a church, school and brewery to cater for the social needs of their employees. (It is believed to be the first place where the Mill management provided innovations such as these, as well as sick play.) It is a substantially intact example of Georgian ‘town planning’ and an Outstanding Conservation area with 51 listed structures.

The Catrine Community Powerdown project started in April 2009 and the Trust were able to employ their first staff member as a Powerdown Officer to kick off the carbon footprint reduction programme of home energy checks, provision of carbon reduction advice and also looking at some 'renewable energy' generating schemes which would provide a sustainable income for the Trust. Further Climate Challenge Fund grant funding for two part time Energy Efficiency Advisors came along in July 2010 and April 2011 which ensured that the Powerdown team could continue their great work.

They have been very successful and enthusiastic in running a whole series of promotional activities and events in Catrine, some in conjunction with other voluntary organisation, which have ranged from themed displays, composting, grow your own 'take away', environmentally friendly cosmetics pamper nights, fair-trade tea & chocolate sampling, Cuban theme cook school event, Eco Fair weeks and a whole range of energy efficiency benefits including home energy check visits.

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. To date it has invested over £500million in Scotland’s heritage.

Further information

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