Pontefract Castle secures Heritage Lottery Fund



A painting of Pontefract Castle in its heyday by Alexander Keirinx dating to 1640

Wakefield Council has received a confirmed grant of £3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for Pontefract Castle's Key to the North project, it was announced today.

The money will allow parts of the castle not seen by the public since 1649 to be opened up. This will include the Sally Port, Swillington Tower, restored Victorian paths and three viewing platforms, two of which will be fully accessible.

The project aims to improve the visitor experience at the castle by carrying out conservation work which will take it off English Heritage's 'At Risk' register. The work will also restore and extend the Arts and Crafts barn to provide improved learning facilities, a shop and a café.

Cllr Les Shaw, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, said: "We are delighted that the HLF is supporting our work at Pontefract Castle with this grant. The money will help put Pontefract on the map for tourists, building on what is an already popular site, and will certainly bring wider economic benefits into the town.

"The castle is significant not just in our district's history, but in the country's history as the site of the death of King Richard II and a Royalist stronghold during the English Civil Wars.

“How amazing to think that we can open up parts of this immensely important building not seen for hundreds of years. I’m sure people from all over the district and beyond will be keen to join in with one of the events made possible by this extra money and experience a piece of thousand-year-old history.”

Fiona Spiers, Head of HLF Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "Pontefract Castle has had a long and varied history, ranging from the murder of a king, through civil war sieges to the cultivation of licorice. HLF is really pleased to be able to invest this money in conserving and rejuvenating the site, helping to tell the important role the castle has played in events that shaped the country. We were particularly impressed by the passion and support local people have shown for this project which will hopefully lead to many more visitors discovering the charms and history of the castle."

The money will enable a comprehensive programme of learning activities and events to be delivered, and there will be opportunities for the public to join in the delivery with a volunteer programme offering four different styles of work opportunity. Additional funding for the £3.5million project is from English Heritage and Wakefield Council.

Notes to editors

Pontefract Castle lies within the historic heart of Pontefract in West Yorkshire. It has a long and colourful history and has frequently been at the centre of national events, acting as a Royal residence, centre of local administration and prison. There are many key stories to tell, from the building of the first timber castle in the 11th century, to its deliberate destruction in the 17th century. Edward I called Pontefract 'The Key to the North' and Richard II was imprisoned and later murdered in the castle, inspiring Shakespeare to immortalise the castle as a “bloody prison, fatal and ominous to noble peers.”

During the Wars of the Roses (1454-85) Pontefract Castle was used as a Lancastrian stronghold, in the 16th century Henry VIII’s fifth wife, Catherine Howard was reportedly found with her lover in the castle’s Royal Apartments, and during the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) the Royalist castle underwent three Parliamentarian sieges before being demolished on the request of the townspeople of Pontefract in 1649.

Since then, Pontefract Castle has been used as a place for liquorice cultivation and later as a romantic ruin and pleasure garden, complete with tennis courts and ornamental rose gardens.

The castle is now managed by Wakefield Council on behalf of the Duchy of Lancaster and is open to visitors free of charge, throughout the year.