Auckland Castle secures £9m Heritage Lottery Fund



Auckland Castle, palace of the Prince Bishops of Durham Sean Elliott Photography

It means work can now begin on building a dramatic two storey museum extension, and renovating the centuries-old castle's state rooms, from where the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham once ruled the North of England unopposed.

Up to 130 jobs will be created, acting as a major catalyst for the regeneration of Bishop Auckland and the surrounding area.

Last night the Auckland Castle Trust's Chief Executive, David Ronn, said he was "absolutely delighted" that the project had secured the grant, one of the biggest made by the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East of England.

"It is fantastic news not just for Auckland Castle but the whole area, a real vote of public confidence. The HLF decision comes on the back of two years of hard work by a great many people."

"To say that we are absolutely delighted is an understatement, and the size of this award proves that the North East is taken seriously by the Heritage Lottery Fund."

He added: "The value of this grant to both Auckland Castle and the immediate area cannot be understated. The work it will allow us to do at the castle, and all the activity that will flow from that – job, training and volunteering opportunities -

will play a major part in helping to breathe new life into Bishop Auckland.

“Regeneration and growth, both of the castle and the town, has always been central to the trust’s long-term plans, and the development of a new museum wing and the renovation of the castle go to the heart of that.”

Chris Mullin, Chairman of HLF North East, said: “This project clearly demonstrates how by investing in heritage, the National Lottery can have a direct impact on the economic health of our local communities.

“Thanks to Lottery players, this investment in Auckland Castle will not only restore this nationally important part of our heritage, it will help regenerate the local economy of Bishop Auckland, which has suffered more than most from the decline of traditional industries.”

The Auckland Castle Trust has pledged £7m towards the total £17m cost of the project, which includes a museum extension and overall restoration scheme, with the HLF grant making up the remainder.

The HLF had already awarded initial support of £1m in 2013 to develop the proposals, taking the granting body’s total commitment to the project to £10m.

The museum extension will be built on to the existing 16th-century Scotland Wing and will house a new immersive museum experience over 11 galleries exploring the history of faith in the British Isles.

The building, which has been designed by Niall McLaughlin in association with Purcell and echoes wooden Anglo Saxon churches of the 6th and 7th centuries, was granted planning permission by Durham County Council in April.

The ground breaking exhibition will include a permanent and dynamic multi-media installation of both national and international significance presenting works of art and artefacts covering pre-history to the present.

Visitors will be challenged and excited by objects dating back to when our earliest ancestors in Britain started creating art, through to the impact of faith on the formation of contemporary society.

Among the remarkable and powerful items that will be on display will be the Cottingham Tank, a Viking lead font that is a fusion of Pagan and Christian beliefs.

The Auckland Castle Trust has also acquired four rare stained glass panels from Compton Verney that were among the last to be made before the Reformation, and two striking Bronze Age swords that were deliberately deposited as votive offerings.

Work on this and the renovation of the Scotland Wing will begin in spring 2016.

Phase two within the castle, which will see the palace home of the Prince Bishops returned to its former grandeur allowing the stories of those who have lived, worked and died within its walls during its near 1,000 year life to be told, will start in September next year.

All the work will be completed by 2018.

In a completely separate ground breaking scheme, the Auckland Castle Trust was in March granted planning permission to build a visually stunning £2.5m welcome building to greet visitors to what is one of Europe’s most important ecclesiastical sites.

Work on this will start in November this year and take around six months to complete. Further information is available at the Auckland Castle website.

Notes to editors

Auckland Castle – one of the UK's most important historical buildings - is run by the charitable Auckland Castle Trust, which was established in 2012 with the aim of restoring the castle, its art collection, the Deer Park and gardens to their former glory, ensuring they remain open to the public for generations to come.

Since the days of the Norman Conquest in the 11th Century, Auckland Castle has been a seat of power.

For almost 900 years, it has been the palace of the Prince Bishops of Durham and although the site where Auckland Castle now stands has seen numerous changes, few will have been as far reaching and visionary as those which are set to take place in the 21st Century with the aim of ensuring it continues to be a landmark building for many centuries to comes.

Further information

For more information, interviews and pictures please contact Jane Hall, Auckland Castle's PR and communications consultant, on 01388 743 750 or 07880 923 507.



Auckland Castle, palace of the Prince Bishops of Durham Sean Elliott Photography

Lottery investment in Auckland Castle to spark major regeneration