

Thumbs up for Highcliffe Castle

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Development funding of £233,100 has also been awarded to help the council progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date. The project aims to repair and reopen a full wing of the castle which is currently derelict inside, and create a dynamic Heritage Centre for visitors to discover the fascinating story of this magnificent building.

Participation will be the watch word, with staff and volunteers engaging visitors of all ages in activities relating to the heritage. A priceless collection of medieval stained glass that belonged to Lord Stuart de Rothesay will be conserved and displayed within the castle with visitors able to observe the process first hand. The project aims to receive back on loan from the Victoria & Albert Museum, key pieces of the

original furniture and to display them within the building, also, to restore the Victorian kitchen and create a dynamic study centre.

The grounds will also benefit from the grant, and there are plans to improve the parkland including more interpretation of the influence of Capability Brown.

Highcliffe Castle was built between 1831 and 1836, was lavishly furnished in the 18th Century French style and played host to royalty, the rich and famous, including Harry Gordon Selfridge, who leased the castle from 1916 to 1922. It is a focal point for the local community who enjoy a wide range of exhibitions and events throughout the year. It had a chequered history after it was sold in 1950 and by the end of the following decade was reduced to a fire-ravaged, roofless ruin. Assisted by a HLF grant in 1994, the exterior of the building was restored and Highcliffe Castle rose like a Phoenix from the ashes of the fire. This project is a crucial part of the overall repair and restoration programme, and will let the 'Phoenix fly'.

Cllr Ray Nottage, Leader of Christchurch Borough Council, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. The project is not merely about restoration but about creating a lasting legacy for Christchurch and an attraction that will support the local economy and be enjoyed for generations to come."

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "HLF's initial support for these exciting plans mean that the last piece in the conservation jigsaw can be put in place at Lord Stuart de Rothsay's 'fantasy' house - Highcliffe Castle. By restoring the East Wing, creating new learning spaces, reinstating the internationally important stained glass collection and doubling the areas open to the public; this impressive project will totally transform the visitor experience at Highcliffe and ensure the Castle's long-term future.

"This project is particularly good news as Christchurch is one of our development areas where we've historically funded less projects. We're delighted to be supporting Christchurch Borough Council and look forward to seeing their plans progress over the coming months."

Notes to editors

A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

We have identified a number of priority development areas, including Christchurch, within the South West. They will be the focus of additional targeted activity by our development staff who will be doing more to raise awareness about Heritage Lottery Fund programmes and supporting local organisations and groups in making applications for grants in these areas.

Further information

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