

Auckland Castle redevelopment receives support

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A first-round pass with development funding of £1million means that the trust moves one step closer to securing a delivery grant of an additional £9million from the HLF at a later date, to redevelop the 800 year-old Bishop's Palace located in the historic market town of Bishop Auckland.

The Auckland Castle project will transform the largely unknown private dwelling, now under the ownership of the Auckland Castle Trust after being saved by philanthropist Jonathan Ruffer last July, into a major heritage site and visitor destination of regional, national and international significance attracting around 120,000 visitors in five years time.

The initial funds will secure the development phase of the scheme, which will involve the appointment of key personnel, further research into the site, and the procurement of an architectural team to deliver the project.

The full scope of the project will involve the restoration of the castle's state rooms and chapel and the remodelling and extension of the Scotland Wing and other parts of the site to ensure it is capable of sustaining two permanent exhibitions of international stature, and to provide facilities for visitors.

Home of Durham's Prince Bishops for more than 800 years, Auckland Castle opened to the public this April under the ownership of the trust. One of the most appealing features of the castle is its Long Dining Room featuring rare paintings by Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán, some of the most significant religious treasures in Europe. The paintings depict Jacob and his 12 sons, and have been a part of the castle's history for more than 250 years. Their place at the palace was only secured when last year Mr Ruffer bought and gifted the paintings to a charitable trust that holds the paintings for the benefit of the people of the North East.

The Heritage Lottery Fund's investment would ensure the long-term sustainable future of Auckland Castle and would also have a significant impact on the economic prosperity of Bishop Auckland and the surrounding area.

The project is expected to create a significant number of jobs at the castle and many more as a result of the scheme's wider impact. In addition, the project will create supply chain opportunities and the trust is committed to procuring local expertise wherever appropriate.

Speaking of the confidence that HLF has shown in the project by awarding the development funding, Rowena Hackwood, Chief Executive of the Auckland Castle Trust, said: "We were over the moon to receive the news of our successful application to the HLF. The announcement has given us great confidence to pursue our vision for the castle and the area, and we are looking forward to a close working relationship with the HLF as we turn our vision into reality."

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “Auckland Castle is one of County Durham’s most distinctive landmarks with over 800 years worth of history to showcase. We were hugely impressed by a set of really imaginative plans to open up the site and applaud the generosity of local philanthropist Jonathan Ruffer which enabled the castle and paintings to be put in trust last year. This is the first step in a complex journey and we look forward to working closely with them both as proposals develop further.”

The Auckland Castle project will provide exciting new opportunities for local enterprises, educators, research institutes, young people, volunteers and visitors alike.

Further information

More information can be found on [The Auckland Castle website](#) or call 013 8874 3750.

Press Ahead: Lindsey Spears on 0191 516 6235 / 07946 781 134, email: ls@pressahead.info or Louise Robinson on 0191 516 6235 / 07949 044 380, email: lr@pressahead.info or Mégan Waggott on 0191 516 6235 / 07534 937 932, email: mw@pressahead.info.