

HLF South East Press Release

Embargoed to 00.01am Monday 18th July 2011

Unique Victorian ‘time capsule’ at Combe Mill to be saved

Combe Mill, a Grade II* listed sawmill and working industrial museum part of the Blenheim Estate in Oxfordshire, has been awarded a confirmed grant of £768,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The money will enable the Combe Mill Society – run entirely by passionate local volunteers – to restore and secure the long term future of the mill and run exciting ‘hands on’ education activities for the local community and visitors of all ages.

The site represents a rare time capsule of Victorian industrial and social heritage that once restored and improved for visitors has the capacity to become a star attraction for West Oxfordshire. Situated near to the Blenheim World Heritage Site, the mill dates to 1852 when it was built as a dual powered sawmill run by both water and steam. Although there is a mention of a mill at Combe in the Domesday Book, the beam engine and Cornish boiler date to the mid-nineteenth century and are exceptional examples of their type surviving in-situ. Closed as a commercial mill in the 1950s, other contents at the site include early machinery and a blacksmith’s forge which also remain unaltered since built over a hundred and fifty years ago.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East, said:

“Combe Mill at Blenheim has the potential to become a major heritage attraction. The saw mill and its surviving artefacts are truly rare examples of our fascinating industrial heritage, and when this site is restored to its former glory it will have the opportunity to offer the local community and visitors alike a real ‘Victorian experience’ to rival that of any in the UK.”

Key to the project will be greater opportunities for widening the Combe Mill story to new audiences, with school partnerships, opportunities for new volunteers to get involved in project management and construction work, family events and costume days, and activities for local adult learners all planned.

Combe Mill Society Chairman, Tony Simmons, explained the significance of the award:

“We are absolutely thrilled to have this grant and are very grateful to the HLF for their confidence in our ability to carry out this important project. The enthusiasm of our visitors and the local community for the Mill to be conserved has been rewarded and we can now remedy over fifty years of neglect to secure this fascinating place for generations to come.”

The capital works to the building include repairs to the roof, windows, stonework and render, greatly improved access for all with the installation of a lift to all floors, and new catering and toilet facilities.

The museum is open Weds & Sun throughout the year, and additional opening days are planned once the works are complete. The mill is in steam on the third Sunday of each month, and the next event will take place this weekend on Sunday 17th July between 10am – 5pm.

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Notes to Editors:

* The HLF grant to the project Combe Mill Restoration is for £768,000 (90% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

For more information about Combe Mill Society, please see:

<http://www.combemill.org/>

Heritage Lottery Fund

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. HLF has supported 30,000 projects, allocating £4.5billion across the UK, Website: www.hlf.org.uk.

To date, HLF has made 79 awards in West Oxfordshire amounting to just over £5.6million.

Further information, images and interview requests:

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