

Astley saved

by RYAN MERRIMAN

A CASTLE on the brink of collapse that was the home of three Queens of England has taken a major step closer to being saved.

Astley Castle has been given a massive boost as plans by the Landmark Trust to save it are now forging ahead thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) pledging support of £1.47 million.

This is great news for the Landmark Trust which is trying to get a project up and running to restore the castle for a number of years.

Costing a total of £2.2 million to restore, Landmark is now developing a fundraising campaign to secure the remaining funds.

English Heritage has also confirmed a grant of £300,000 towards emergency stabilisation work which will start later this year to stop the building deteriorating further.

Peter Pearce, director of the Landmark Trust, said: "For the past 30 years the castle has gradually deteriorated to the sad state we see it in today.

"This marvellous news from the Heritage Lottery Fund brings us closer to our vision of giving the building a future and allowing many thousands of people each year to experience it.

"This site has witnessed events over the past 1,000 years. We must find a way to save it and will work closely with the HLF to make this a reality."

Dating back to the 1200s the castle is of significant national importance, but it has lain derelict since it was devastated by fire in 1978.

It is often known to many as the home of three Queens of England Elizabeth Woodville, Elizabeth of York and Lady Jane Grey.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the West Midlands, Anne Jenkins, said: "We are delighted to be able to support Astley Castle. It is a much-loved historic landmark in North Warwickshire in dire need of help before it is lost forever.

"There is now a clear strategy to save this damaged and neglected 'at risk' historic building and give it an impressive mix of educational, social and community uses.

"The support of the Heritage Lottery Fund will ensure that the building can be enjoyed by everyone as they learn about their past for many years to come."

The perilous state of the castle means that a normal conservation solution is no longer possible so Landmark has proposed to create modern holiday lets in the ruined walls.

This will allow the building to be used and enjoyed once again so that it never again falls

into disrepair.

The project will also include a learning programme with schools, eight annual public open days with interpretation and special activities, in addition to improvements to parkland routes and signage.

Tim Johnston, English Heritage regional director for the West Midlands, added: "The Landmark Trust has come up with an innovative scheme that will breathe new life into this significant historic building at risk.

"We are delighted that it has the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and that English Heritage is also able to support the project with a grant of £300,000 which will go towards emergency repair work."

Heartland Evening News, 27/06/2008