



For Immediate Release:  
January 2025

## Leeds Castle Advances Accessibility and Sustainability Initiatives with Grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As part of its transformative initiatives funded by a £225,700 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in November 2023, Leeds Castle has advanced activations to enhance accessibility, preserving its historic structure and resilience, and engaging the local community, through;

- **Accessibility Improvements:** An access audit by Accessible UK has identified key enhancements for visitors with mobility and sensory needs.
- **New Facilities:** Enhanced wheelchairs are now available for visitors, with plans for autism-friendly spaces and improved signage to create a more welcoming environment.
- **Public Transport Collaboration:** Partnering with Stagecoach to launch a new 10X bus route that stops directly at the Castle, improving access for visitors and the local community.
- **Heritage Conservation:** Ongoing preservation work on the Castle's stonework, alongside a mechanical and engineering audit aimed at reducing energy consumption and supporting renewable energy integration.
- **Community Engagement:** Workshops planned with local groups, including young carers and LGBTQ+ individuals, to break down barriers and foster inclusivity.
- **Economic Resilience Strategy:** The hospitality audit outcomes has already seen enhanced marketing outputs, restructure of the sales team, and will maximise event spaces to improve revenue generation.

As one of Kent's most iconic historic landmarks, Leeds Castle offers a unique blend of history, beauty, and cultural significance. The Castle attracts visitors from around the world, serving as a popular destination for history lovers, families, and nature enthusiasts alike. Support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund has enabled Leeds Castle to create a comprehensive plan focused on improving accessibility, heritage conservation, community engagement, hospitality ventures, and sustainability. Since receiving the grant, Leeds Castle has begun introducing initiatives to enhance the visitor experience and improve inclusivity.

Helen Bonser-Wilton, Chief Executive of Leeds Castle Foundation, remarked, "We are immensely grateful to National Lottery players and the Heritage Fund for their ongoing support. These initiatives represent our commitment to accessibility and sustainability while enhancing the experience for all visitors. We are dedicated to preserving our rich heritage and making Leeds Castle a welcoming place for everyone."

Working alongside Accessible UK has identified key access improvements for visitors with mobility and sensory needs. The outputs of the audit has already seen the creation of 'Access Champions' with 50 staff members being trained to provide better support. Additionally, new wheelchairs are now available for visitors, alongside plans for autism-friendly spaces and clearer signage to create a more comfortable environment.



In partnership with Stagecoach, a new 10X bus route will stop directly at Leeds Castle, enhancing public transport access for visitors and the local community. Efforts are also underway to extend these public transport services to link with local Hollingbourne Station.

Work has begun on preserving the Castle's stonework and reducing energy consumption through a new mechanical and engineering audit. These efforts will protect the Castle's structures and support long-term plans for renewable energy integration. Actions from this audit have already been implemented to drive down costs and improve operational efficiency.

Workshops with local groups, including young carers and LGBTQ+ individuals, are set to take place as part of an audience development initiative. These efforts aim to break down barriers and make Leeds Castle more accessible and welcoming to diverse audiences. Furthermore, workshops with Leeds Castle staff, volunteers and audience development consultants took place in March to gain valuable feedback on barriers for certain groups that would prevent them from visiting the Castle.

To allow Leeds Castle to become more resilient, a hospitality audit has been completed with new developments already made in the restructuring of the sales team – introducing a Business Development Executive, supporting marketing outputs – updating website and digital experiences as well as prioritising marketing spend and collateral development, and maximising event spaces to drive revenue – the soon-to-be introduced Gate Tower for small events and groups.

Leeds Castle extends its heartfelt gratitude to the players of the National Lottery and The National Lottery Heritage Fund for their unwavering support, belief in the Castle's mission, and their commitment to preserving and enhancing our shared cultural heritage.

- ENDS -

### **About Leeds Castle Foundation**

Leeds Castle is considered a national treasure, providing a window onto over nine hundred years of British history. It is a haven of tranquillity and offers a wealth of discovery and enjoyment for all ages.

Situated five miles southeast of Maidstone in Kent, Leeds Castle's rich and riveting history, including serving six of England's medieval queens, to its elaborate transformation into a glamorous 1930s country house retreat for the influential and famous by Anglo-American heiress, Lady Olive Baillie, secures its place as one of the most visited historic attractions in Britain.

The Castle and its estate is preserved and maintained by the Leeds Castle Foundation, a not-for-profit charity.

For more visitor information, please visit [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

- Leeds Castle, Broomfield, Maidstone ME17 1PL
- Telephone 01622 765 400 or email [enquiries@leeds-castle.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@leeds-castle.co.uk)



## About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033.

Over the next ten years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

We help protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

We are passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund [www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk).