

‘Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution’ receives £9.9million COVID-19 recovery funding

19 March 2022

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) grant will support vital conservation work at UNESCO World Heritage Site Ironbridge.

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust – which runs ten museums across the internationally significant [Ironbridge Gorge](#) in Shropshire – is the first recipient of our [COVID-19 Response Fund](#) to be announced.

With almost £10m funding, the Trust will be able to carry out a backlog of urgent restoration and conservation work to 49 historic buildings and structures. These include five scheduled monuments and 30 listed buildings.

The grant also includes £4.5m endowment funding, which will be invested to generate income for ongoing conservation maintenance, ensuring the long-term future of Ironbridge’s heritage assets.

World Heritage Site

Ironbridge Gorge stretches across 550 hectares in Shropshire, England. Considered a catalyst of the Industrial Revolution, the area contains many historical sites of industry, all situated in their original context. These include the remains of:

- mines
- pit mounds
- spoil heaps
- foundries
- factories
- warehouses
- transport systems

It is also home to an extensive collection of artefacts and archives that tell the story of the people and processes that powered industry.

The gorge afforded access to coal, minerals, wood and the River Severn, which ultimately connected Ironbridge to the world. [Its UNESCO citation states](#): “The Industrial Revolution had its 18th century roots in the Ironbridge Gorge and spread worldwide, leading to some of the most far-reaching changes in human history”.

England’s most significant heritage at risk

The site has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, with visitor figures dropping by almost 75% in 2020. The site’s army of dedicated volunteers also could not provide their usual level of maintenance support.

With income from visitors down, The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust’s funds for essential repair and conservation work were substantially reduced. Recent flooding has also had a devastating impact.

The survival of Ironbridge’s heritage in its original context is crucial for maintaining the integrity of its World Heritage Site designation, which helps it attract visitors from across the world.

NHMF funding lifeline

Dr Simon Thurley CBE, Chair of The National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: “I am delighted to announce our support of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust today. The Ironbridge Gorge is one of the most important historic sites in the UK, the cradle of the industrial revolution and a monument of global heritage significance.

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Dr Simon Thurley CBE, Chair of The National Heritage Memorial Fund

“The pandemic and severe flooding have had a catastrophic impact on the Trust. This government grant of just under £10million, allocated by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, will stabilise important monuments and buildings at risk and secure their long-term future through an endowment.”

COVID-19 Response Fund grants available

Funding for Ironbridge comes from the Cultural Asset Fund element of our [£40m COVID-19 Response Fund](#)

The Cultural Assets Fund is a £20million government fund to protect England's most significant heritage from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to this, NHMF's own £20m commitment ensures funding is available for treasured heritage across the UK that have been impacted by the pandemic.

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