

REPORT OF VISITOR SERVICES MANAGER NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE

SUBJECT: CASTELL HENLLYS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update members on current operations at Castell Henllys, recent developments, future plans and partner projects.



INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Castell Henllys is an Iron Age hill fort which sits on a spur of land overlooking a small river to the north of the Preseli Hills, set within this rugged landscape of north Pembrokeshire the site has been owned since 1991 by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and has been used since this date to deliver an understanding of the ancient landscape and our Iron Age heritage.

Although it is one of many sites of Iron Age activity in the area Castell Henllys is unique as in order to give visitors a feeling for life in an iron age fort roundhouses have been re constructed on the original foundations giving an insight into how it would have looked over 2,000 years ago.

In 2013 funding from the “Makers of Wales” prehistoric strand of the Cadw pan-Wales Interpretation Plan, awarded Castell Henllys £238,500 from the European Union together with £41,500 TMF funding from the Welsh Government to help the

site to become a hub for pre-history in the Preseli area of Pembrokeshire. The funding allowed for the:

- Redevelopment of the Llys Annwn building to provide reception, retail, café, toilets and exhibition spaces with new biomass heating system.
- Redevelopment of the Pant Glas building to provide offices, rest rooms and storage facilities.
- Development of new guidebook and leaflet
- Development of exhibitions in the new visitor centre
- Development of a comprehensive interpretation scheme to include seven prehistoric satellite sites in North Pembrokeshire (Pentre Ifan, Carreg Coetan Arthur, Foel Drygarn Hillfort, Carn Meini, Dinas Mawr Promontory Fort, Gors Fawr Stone Circle, Crugiau Cemmaes).
- Development of 20 new signage and interpretation panels
- Removal of in total of over 50 existing interpretation panels.
- Total removal of all panels and other interpretation elements from the village itself.

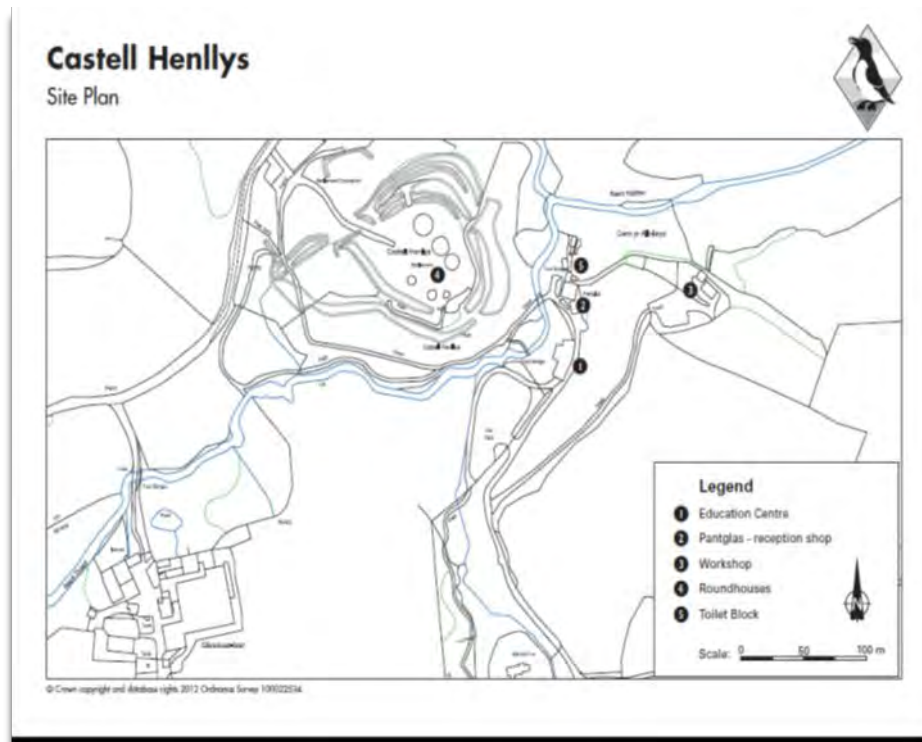
As well as the historical aspects the site is used extensively to explore environmental and life style issues either with booked visiting groups or in daily guided tours and the site has become one of the main visitor attractions in North Pembrokeshire, attracting nearly 22,000 visitors in 2017

In 2017 over 4,000 school children participated in the award winning Educational School Programme. The programme is entirely cross curricular in its content, although it concentrates on the historic aspect of life in the Iron Age, and gives the children opportunities to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the cultural, environmental, historical and linguistic aspects of Wales.

200 events took place at Castell Henllys last year, these proved to be well attended despite the adverse weather during the main season. Old favourites were joined by new events including an evening event of tales and songs from Celtic Myth and Legend with Robin Williamson.

In order to support local accommodation providers and local businesses the site remains open over the quieter winter months. Every effort is also made to make the site as accessible as possible to everyone. People with mobility problems are offered the use of a Trampler bike which they can drive themselves thus giving them a degree of independence or, if they do not feel capable of using the bike, a member of staff will ferry them to and from the fort in the site's electric buggy.

The site currently holds the SANDFORD AWARD FOR HERITAGE IN EDUCATION, VISIT WALES HIDDEN GEM ACCOLADE, TRIP ADVISOR CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE and the leasehold café holds VISIT WALES QUALITY CAFÉ ACCOLADE.



SITE ARCHAEOLOGY

In early June 2017 Castell Henllys welcomed back Professor Harold Mytum and his team of students as well as Dyfed Archaeological Trust with their team of volunteers to excavate the remains of the Cookhouse prior to its rebuilding.



It had been 35 years since Professor Mytum began digging at Castell Henllys and together with Hugh Foster they reconstructed the first roundhouse in the UK to be built on top of its original location. The excavation of this reconstructed house provided a unique opportunity for the archaeologists to study the effects of the use and deterioration of the house as represented in the soil, which allows us a better understanding of other Iron Age sites.

Letters were also sent out to local primary schools to notify pupils of the dig and Castell Henllys agreed to let the children and their parents in for free. In total 14 families, 22 adults and 31 children visited the dig and participated in the organised archaeological activities.

CAFÉ OFFER

Ysgubor café Castell Henllys has been leased to Wendy Edwards since 01.04.15, an extended license period was awarded in October 2017 taking the current agreement to 31.10.19. Trading figures to date have shown a positive trend and the Café continues to be awarded Visit Wales Quality Café Accolade.

The rationale for extending the licence through to Nov 2019 was to establish a longer trading history for the café prior to the franchisee being re offered to the open market during the latter part of 2019 and using the period between Nov 2017 & Nov 2019 to help and encourage current leaseholder to build her café brand and offer. A lean to store has recently been completed in order to add to the storage space available for development of the café offer.

A recurring problem throughout the café 's trading history has been the inadequate highway signage on the main road, efforts have been made to address this issue with the Wales trunk road agency but their quoted charges for providing the required signage remain prohibitive. As a result, the absence of adequate signage on the highway is going to remain an ongoing unresolved problem.

It should be noted that the income derived from the lease of the café space is not shown on the balance sheet / accounts of the site.

PANT GLAS

Pant Glas is an extended farmhouse) which since the development of the new visitor centre now provides "back of house" services on site (Managers Office, staff room, changing rooms, storage, toilets etc.)

The first floor comprises of a self-contained flat which vacant possession was gained in 2015, alterations have been completed recently on the flat to provide office space, meeting room, changing room and there is a bathroom. Downstairs the space that was associated with the flat has been altered to provide storage and a small staff room, the main floor area of the building will now become a meeting room / exhibition space.

Connectivity is an issue at the site in terms of broadband speed and mobile coverage; options to address this are currently being explored.

Y BWTHYN

Situated on the periphery of the site and reached by a rough track marked as number 3 on the Site Map - the Bwthyn was converted in the 90's to support the

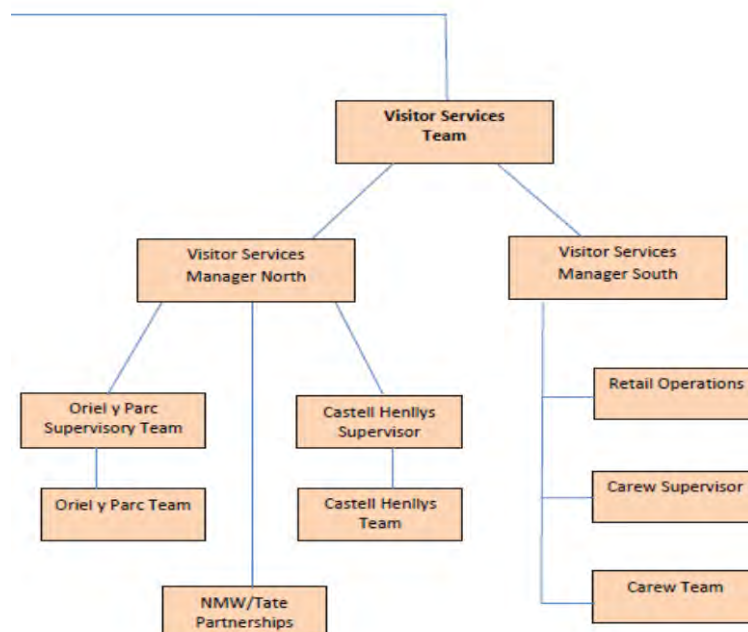
main archaeological dig on site, it includes shower and kitchen facilities; it is currently used as storage for the site, although it has potential for other uses.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO.

STAFF STRUCTURE

Phil Roach the Head of Discovery took early retirement late 2015, his role was not directly filled with his work load being distributed amongst other staff. Rhonwen Owen the manager of Castell Henllys retired in September 2016, the decision was taken not to replace her role directly but to merge her responsibilities, which included Newport Visitor Centre and obviously Castell Henllys with those of the manager of Oriel y Parc.

This led to the structure set out below which is headed up by the Director Countryside, Community and Visitor Services James Parkin



The 30 acre site also benefits from the support of the North Area Warden Team which is managed by Geraint Harris – Dylan Evans (warden) is assigned to the site and is instrumental in ensuring that the site is maintained to a very high standard.

We run events and activities talks, guided tours and work with a whole host of partners both internal and external to promote the site and the National Park, with recent developments and alterations this programme will be enhanced and extended as we move forward. Our schools programme is highly successful, more details below.

SCHOOL CHILDREN ENGAGED THROUGH EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The Castell Henllys Educational Programme for Schools is a four times winner of the prestigious “Sandford Award for Heritage Education”

The dedicated team, chosen not only for their teaching skills but also for their acting abilities, their enthusiasm and passion for history, deliver our education programme through role play and activities.

The programme, concentrates on daily life in the Iron Age and is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils, and is closely linked to the National Curriculum and to the archaeological evidence from the extensive excavations of the site. Pupils will have the opportunity to experience first-hand the austere and precarious life of a pre-historic village.

INCOME AND COST

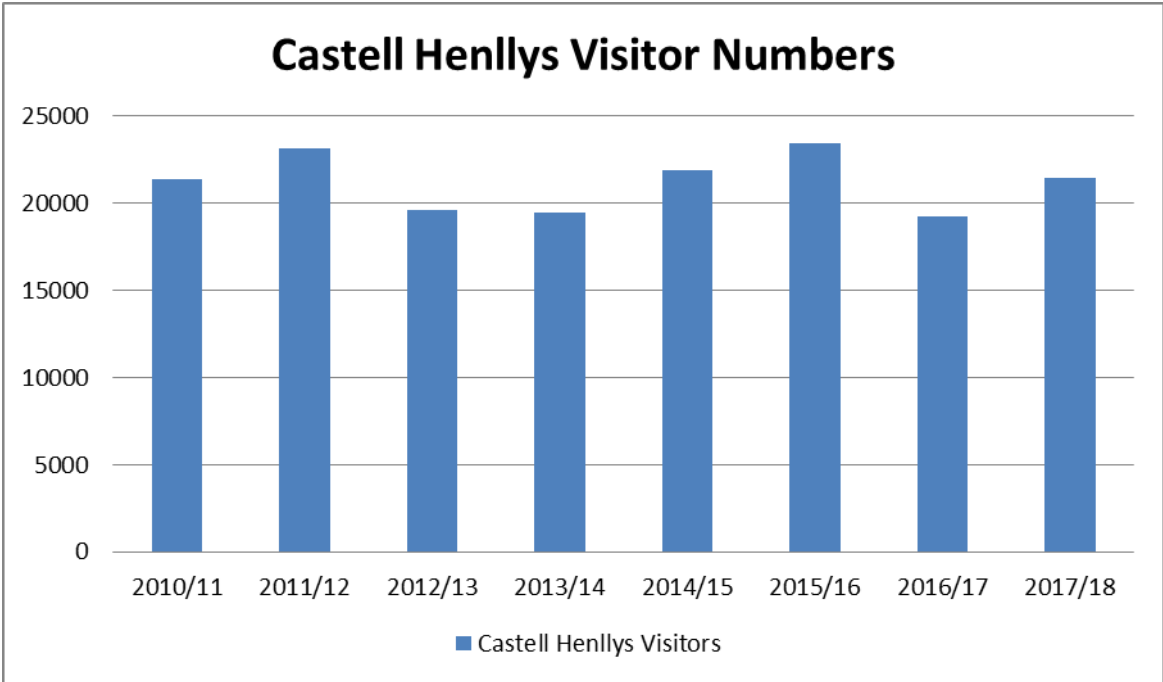
We continue to explore and develop ways of increasing income across the site, and have introduced new elements to what we do; we have also increased the size of events and activities contracting in deliverable elements, i.e. Roman Legio 8 to deliver a Roman experience.

We have increased the scope and level of our marketing and PR and will continue to do so, this has shown a marked improvement in 2017 – 18.

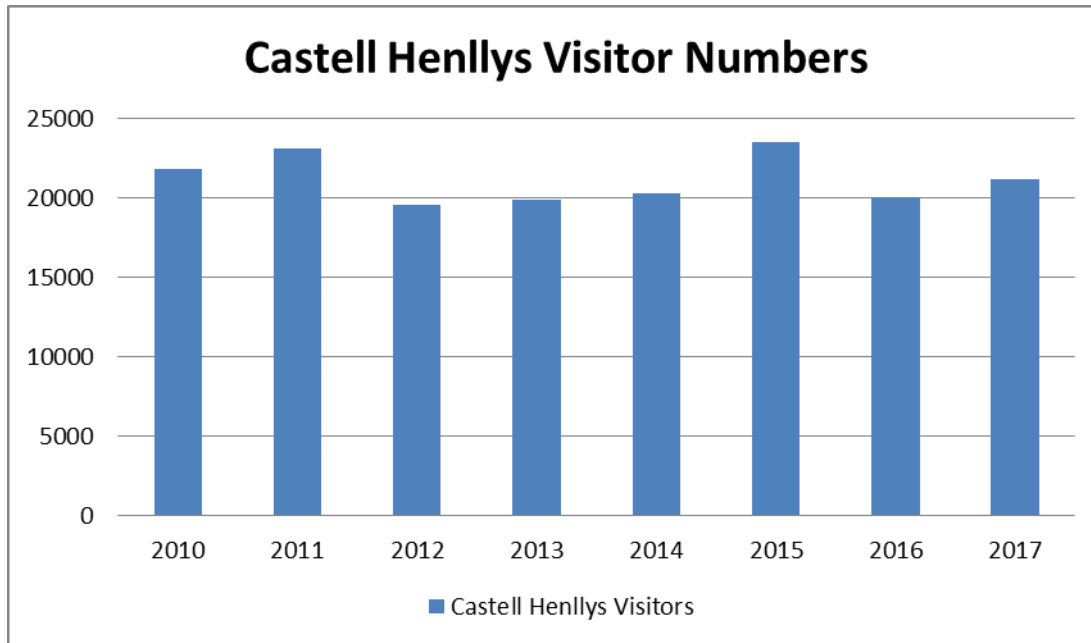
Please note that the income derived from the café lease is not accounted for in any of these reports.

Visitor Numbers

Financial YTD

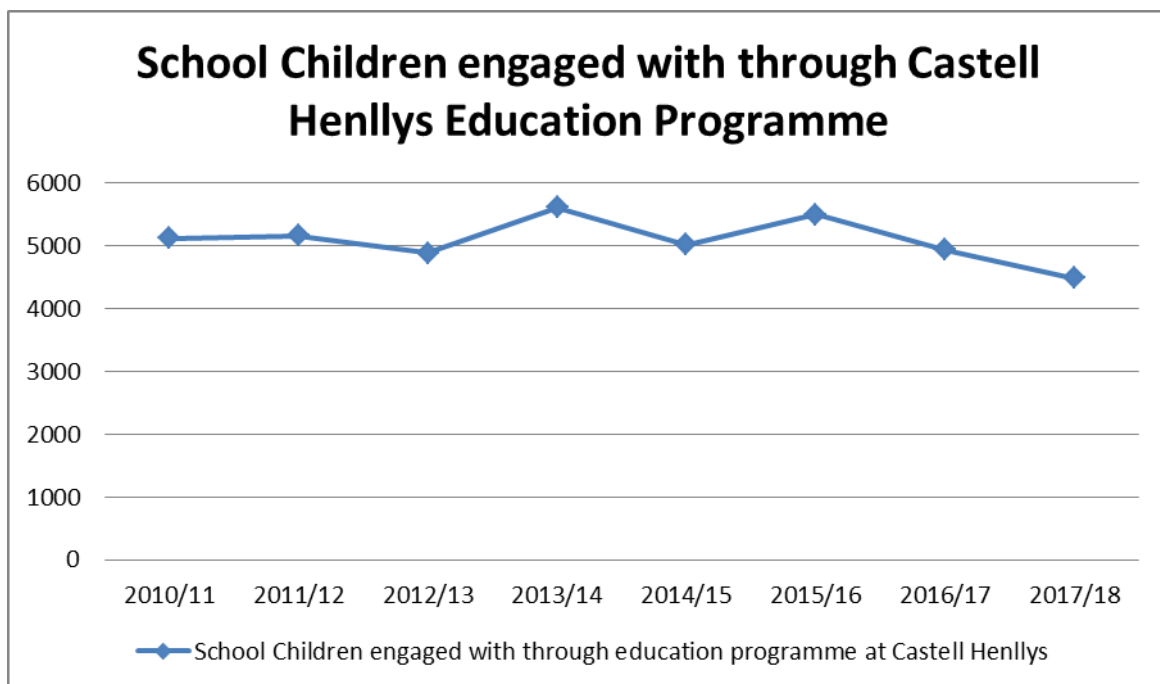


Calendar YTD

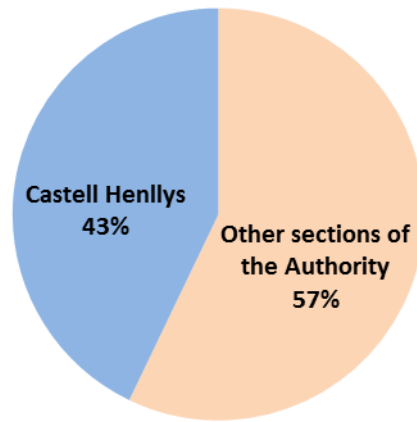


School Children engaged through education programme

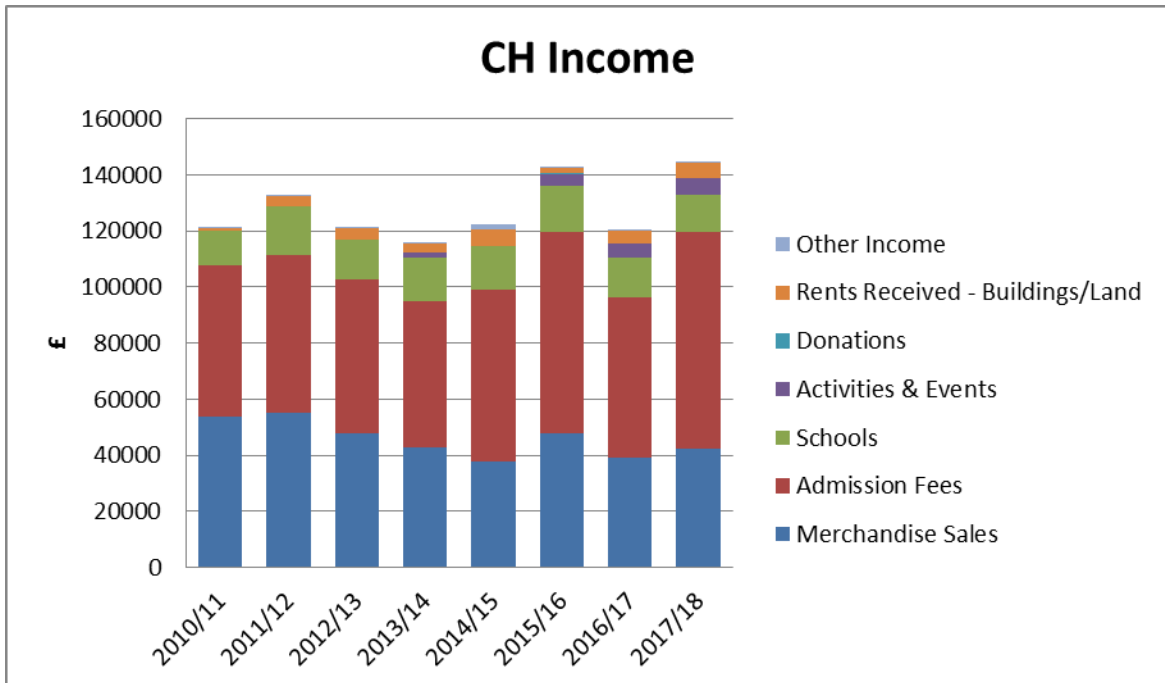
Financial YTD

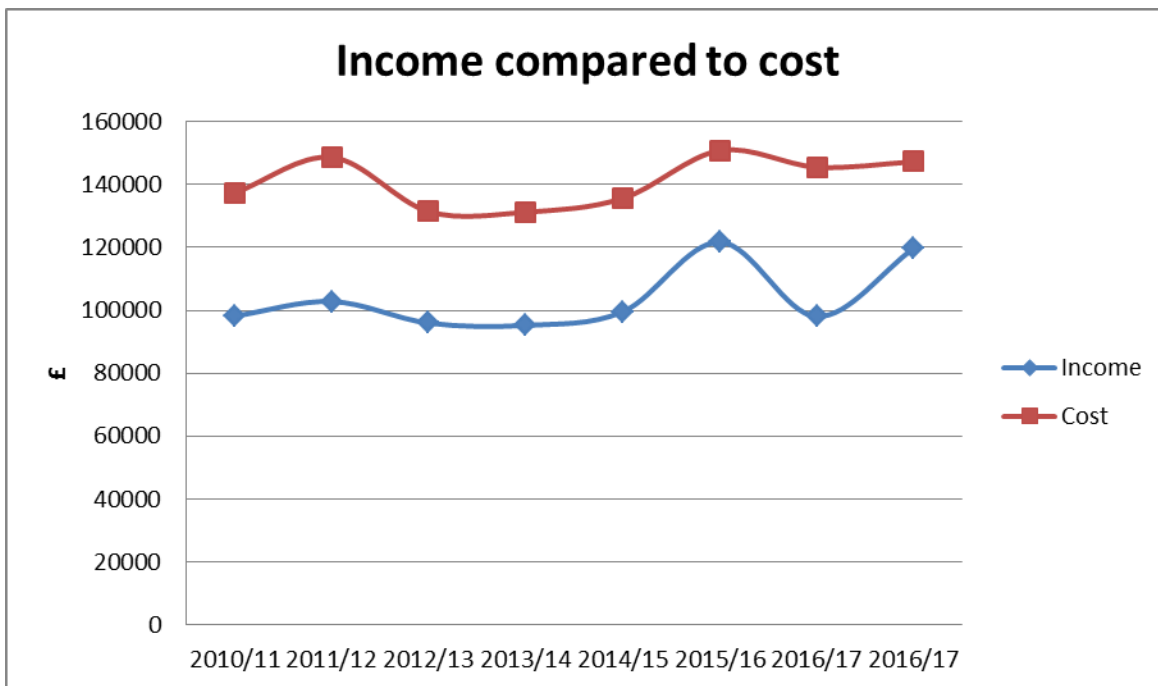


% of PCNPA engagement with school children carried out at Castell Henllys in 2017/18



Income and cost – Financial YTD





Income includes figures relating to stock purchased/held.

In 2014/15 £511,223 was spent on capital renovations.

DEVELOPMENT 2015 – 2017

Rebuilding of the Cook House





Completed in the Spring of 2018, the project was wholly managed and built by the North Warden Team except for the thatching of the roof which was contracted out, the project was completed well under the allocated budget. Elements of the work daubing and support for the archeological dig involved volunteer input, the official opening of the house will hopefully take place at the end of June, lessons learnt from the build will guide the build of the Earthwatch house in 2018-19.

Addition of a Roman Element to activities

In 2017 we moved into the Roman era in terms of some of the activities and events we also offered schools the option to experience this element as a choice for their school visit, most however tend to favour the Iron Age.

Breeding programme for the ewes and pigs

Castell Henllys currently has a flock of nine pedigree Soay sheep, one of the oldest breeds remaining in existence, currently on the endangered list with the rare breed survival trust (RBST), which we are now part of and contributing to.

They are fantastic conservation grazers and are always a favourite attraction on site, especially around lambing time; in 2018 they produced 9 lambs.

The Pigs are brought to site for the summer season, and are also very well-liked by our visitors. Last year we had a litter of piglets born on site, which again was a great attraction. The pigs we have are a traditional breed, and one of the oldest, large black cross wild boar.

Holgar boat

The building of the Holgar was commissioned for documentary purposes for the Discovery Channel by Darlow Smithson Productions, the Holgar is a reconstruction of a Bronze age, sea going vessel. It is reputed that such a boat would have been used to carry Bluestone (Dolerite) from the Preselis, to or as close as possible to Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain.

Since the filming the boat has sat in the harbor in Gwbert near Cardigan and was offered to the site by Swallow Boats as it was deteriorating by being in the water and not cared for or used. We are grateful for the support received from our community archaeologist in enabling us to achieve the relocation of the boat. The boat is currently being cleaned and prepared for the public to experience.

Bee Hives

Working with a local beekeeper the site now hosts 20 hives which have performed well in 2017; honey produced will eventually be sold in the onsite shop. The ecological benefit of bees is well known and the danger to the species well documented, we have been advised to get involved in the accreditation process for Bee Friendly (a Welsh government initiative). We will also have a display hive which the public can view the working of a bee colony / hive in situ in Pantgals early in the summer.

New culvert for pedestrian access

Visitors arriving at Castell Henllys via coach are directed down a path towards the centre car park; the old wooden bridge that crossed a stream at this location had become dangerous due to rot and ground movement. All school visits are sent across this bridge, the bridge was removed in March 2018 and replaced with a culvert, as well as improving the crossing for pedestrians this improvement will allow for machinery to be used to maintain and repair the path and associated land.

Volunteer activity / support and working with specialised groups.

Since an initial volunteer open day in 2016, support has grown for the site and volunteers have taken part and assisted in a wide range of activities. Volunteers were key in the excavation of the round house working with Dyfed Archaeology Trust and also in the daubing of the house under the guidance of our own community archaeologist.

The site has a strong relationship with Plas Dwbwl <http://www.rmt.org/plasdwbwl/> and welcomes students on site on a regular basis to assist with relevant tasks; we also work closely with Clynfyw <http://www.clynfyw.co.uk/> in developing and supporting their clients. Skills in Action Trainees have in previous years used the site extensively for their project as have those involved in the current 'Pathways' initiative.

FUTURE 2018 ONWARDS

An enhanced route for those accessing the site with mobility scooters, wheelchairs and pushchairs, including enhanced way marking. This would include enhancements to the current herb garden (on the route currently used for mobility scooter access) Improvements to the main track from visitor centre to the site including revetment work, currently used by 4x4 vehicles for transportation of visitors with mobility issues. Funded from Welsh Government.

Rebuilding of ramparts and entrance to fort including palisades and gates, reconstructing the Iron Age gateway to the site, current structure is very basic and in need of replacing and upgrading. Funded from Welsh Government.

During peak periods, the car park reaches capacity. Capacity could be improved with resurfacing using sustainable methods (mesh) and marking out bays including bays for those drivers that are registered disabled. Current provision for separate disabled parking at the back of the site is deemed unsuitable. Funded from Welsh Government.

Increasing the size of the hard standing area in front of visitor centre, improving the entrance from the car park including path widening. At present the path to the covered area at the front door, leads visitors to the right of the entrance, and then a left turn back toward the doors and often visitors are heard discussing the direction to take. Removing the balustrading, facing the car park, and forming a new wider path, would be more welcoming to the visitor and create a useable space for stalls etc. Repair works are needed below this decked area, to repair decaying timber. Funded from Welsh Government and maintenance budget.

Alterations to reception area to improve flow of visitors and create more space. Make changes to interpretation and retail areas. Funded from Welsh Government

Grey water treatment plant, the current sewage treatment works involves monthly removal of sewage offsite. This is environmentally unsustainable and is a cost c£7000 annually.

Development of a new on-site sewage treatment to replace the current system reducing long term costs and enabling the site to cope with increased visitors, a fairly substantial investment but one quite quickly realised when considering utility costs . Funded from Welsh Government

Fencing of the pastures for the stock currently on site – double fencing as a health and safety consideration for visitors in respect of animal borne diseases, (site budget) it is hoped to fence the boundary fence in the near future. This will ensure visitor safety in respect of keeping neighbouring livestock out and marking site boundary.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



mayland123 Mayland, United Kingdom
Reviewed 28 October 2017
[Well worth a visit](#)

We had a great couple of hours at Castell Henllys. The detail is fantastic and the staff there very informative. We took our 8, 10, 11 and 13 year olds who all very much enjoyed their time here and really engaged. Well worth the £22 admission.

Dave T
Reviewed 24 September 2017
[Excellent Visit](#)

This really is a must do the visit was totally fascinating and our guide Bryn brought the village to life. His love of history was very clear and he managed to show complete enthusiasm for the subject which was infectious. The café offered excellent food and the cawl was delicious. It turned an overcast day into a delight

dulux22 Churchdown, United Kingdom
Reviewed 10 September 2017
[Excellent family day out](#)

This place brings to life how the people lived at the time and is fun and interesting for all the family. Made use of the mobility scooter which was a boon. Lots of information presented in a 'hands on' and authentic manner. Had a coffee in the café and there is a little gift shop. Would recommend for a great day out.

COMMENT BOOK

08.10.17 – New Zealand Visitors

Absolutely great – home is nothing like this.

13.04.18 – Trefin / Cardiff

Thank you – brilliant day out and lovely dog walk – 10 years on and we still love coming here.

17.08.17 – Devon

Come with my husband and two children 8 and 5 years and our dog Monty.

We all had a fantastic time. So impressed with it all. Plenty to keep the children interested at a reasonable cost.

All very interesting and good value for money – will definitely recommend.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Outdoor classroom built on existing 'white' tepee site, for flexible use, built using volunteers and stock of wood already held on site it would be of a round pole barn style. This would give additional space to accommodate school groups if the weather was exceptionally bad, it would also give additional space for events and activities again in bad weather.

Nature walks through lower meadow, requiring board walk through one wetland section. Bird/nature hide observing wetland area.

Minibus for historic tours of Pembrokeshire. Access to different demographics groups to heritage sites, incorporating Pentre Ifan,

Development of Meline Church for community use.

it is suggested that the acquirement of Meline Church could be beneficial for the park as being a space in which archaeological artefacts of the park/ Castell Henllys can be displayed and stored, and a library to contain the Archaeological Cambrensis collection, as well as other books left by Phil Bennet which the staff and the public could use for research purposes.

Discussions with Harold Mytum, who has collected substantial data regarding local history (grave stones etc.) also suggest that the church could become a place where visitors and locals could research their family history. A number of visitors to Castell Henllys, particularly those from America, England, Scotland and Australia state that part of their reason for visiting the area is to learn about their ancestors.

International Skills Exchange, where heritage from different countries and cultures is shared on a 'twinning style' exchange. Open to students, staff and volunteers.

Purchase of abutting land to allow growth of events and activities and livestock breeding programme, and to allow the review and possible development of safer access to the site.

Solar farm to replace the wind turbine currently situated in the vicinity of The Bwthyn, the current provision of sustainable power from the wind turbine is unreliable and poor in volume.

Y Bwthyn , consideration of the use of the building for add on income generation for the site – shower / kitchen block for campers – upgrading and adaptation of the site to provide a holiday let – sale of the site for capital benefit.

Ancient white cattle - work with the National Trust in their efforts to preserve and maintain this iconic breed of cattle at Dinefwr which date back to the year 920. They were mentioned in the laws of Hywel Dda (Hywel the Good) who codified the laws of the land and lived at Dinefwr castle the ruins of which remain overlooking the Dinefwr estate. There are only around a thousand breeding females left in the world, that's less than the rare Giant Panda! So their White Park herd really are the rarest of the rare and a living link to our very distant past, it would be good to use Castell Henllys to promote and support their work.

CHALLENGES

Securing investment in the site during a time of public sector budget cuts.

Keeping up with and embracing new technology in terms of visitor interaction.

Keeping and motivating staff on casual / seasonal contracts

OPPORTUNITIES

Oriel y Parc and Castell Henllys are now managed by one officer, this allows for sharing of personnel, knowledge and skills across sites.

Continue to be part of all Wales / UK initiatives in order to raise the profile of the site, giving exposure to the National Park and its objectives as well as benefiting from funding and income.

Embrace Welsh and National strategies in order to grow and expand on the calendar of events and activities again benefiting from funding and income and giving exposure to the National Park and its objectives.

CONCLUSION

Members are asked to note the report.

(For further information, please contact Jenn Jones Visitor Services Manager North Pembrokeshire.

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Consulted/engaged with Sarah Griffiths Castell Henllys Supervisor
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