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Local contractor set to start on £5.5m makeover of Durlston Castle

A Dorset-based contractor is set to begin work on a £5.5 million restoration of Grade II-listed Durlston Castle, the centrepiece of Durlston Country Park and National Nature Reserve near Swanage.

Dorset County Council, which owns and manages the park, has appointed Poole firm Greendale Construction Ltd as contractor for the long-awaited 'Durlston Project'. The renovation will bring the Victorian castle back into full public use as a world-class visitor centre at the eastern gateway to the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

Work is scheduled to get underway on 19 April, with the castle due to re-open in summer 2011. It will then house the 280-acre park's visitor services, gift shop and catering facilities. As well a wide range of exhibitions and displays based around the area's world-renowned natural heritage, the rejuvenated castle will be fully equipped to host everything from conferences to weddings overlooking the Jurassic Coast.

Access to the castle will be prohibited for safety reasons during construction, except for pre-arranged site tours. The country park will remain open for business, except for a few path closures and diversions, with the visitor centre and café open between 10am and 5pm every day.

Work on the project to date has included detailed design by award-winning architects Long and Kentish. The aim of the project is to ensure the site retains its integral beauty, tranquillity and wildlife importance while completely restoring the parts the Victorian castle that have become rundown over the years.

Last summer, stone conservation specialists Sue and Lawrence Kelland, together with some dedicated volunteers, cleaned and repaired Durlston's famous Great Globe – made of 40 tones of Portland limestone – and its associated stone inscriptions.

As part of the project, artist Gary Breeze will create a 'Timeline' along the new zig-zag path to the castle, exploring geological time and change in relation to the Jurassic Coast, and 'The Rock', a one-ton, fossil-packed slab of Purbeck Stone illustrating the diversity of life in a Purbeck lake 120 million years ago, will be positioned within the castle.

More than half of the Durlston Project's funding, £3.1m, has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with significant contributions from the Friends of Durlston, the county council, the South West of England Regional Development Agency and many other charitable trusts, organisations, businesses and individuals.

Dorset County Council countryside ranger service manager, Hamish Murray, said:

“After several years at the development stage it will be fantastic to finally see this exciting project taking shape on the ground and we are particularly pleased that Greendale Construction, a local firm, will be doing the work. The newly restored castle will be a great asset to the whole area and we look forward to a successful opening in 2011.”

Director of Greendale Construction Ltd, Robert Hooker, added:

“We are delighted to have been awarded this major contract. For us, this is the satisfactory culmination of many months of hard work. The Durlston Project is an interesting challenge involving both traditional and modern construction processes. We look forward to working in association with the design team and Dorset County Council to deliver a world class amenity for the local community and visitors to enjoy for many years to come.”

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Notes for editors:

1. An artist's impression of the front of the castle following the restoration work is attached. Please credit Long and Kentish.
2. Established in Poole in 1989 by Rob Hooker and Chris Kane, Greendale Construction Ltd has extensive experience of undertaking conservation works to listed buildings, with recent projects including Highcliffe Castle and Hotel Du Vin, Poole. In 1992, Greendale was awarded Chartered Building Company status and is a founder member of the scheme. It has been awarded Master Builder of the Year commendations in 1994, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2004 and was regional winner in the Master Builder of the Year 2005 competition for its work on Parkstone Golf Club. For more information, go to <http://www.greendaleconstruction.com> or contact Jackie Phillipson at P-PR Media Solutions on (01202) 896698 or email jackie@p-pr.co.uk
3. Durlston Castle was built between 1887 and 1891 by local stonemason and entrepreneur, George Burt, as the centrepiece of his Durlston estate, now Durlston Country Park. Dorset County Council established the country park in 1973, and its Countryside Ranger Service has managed it ever since. This 280-acre countryside paradise was designated a National Nature Reserve in 2008. Its diverse array of wildlife includes birds such as Guillemots, Fulmars, Whitethroats, Stonechats, Skylarks and Peregrine Falcons; flowers including Early Spider Orchids and eight other orchid species; the Adonis Blue, Lulworth Skipper and Marbled White butterflies; and bottlenose dolphins. For more information, go to <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/durlston> and <http://www.durlston.co.uk>
4. The Dorset Countryside Ranger Service manages nearly 40 different sites and visitor facilities across the county, including country parks, local and National

Nature Reserves, semi-ancient woodland, countryside picnic sites and visitor car parks. Over 90 per cent of this land is covered by a range of national and international conservation designations. For more information, go to <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/countryside>

5. Support and funding for the Durlston Project has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with significant contributions from the Friends of Durlston, the county council, the South West of England Regional Development Agency, BP, Viridor Credits, Fine Family Foundation, the Arts Council and the Garfield Weston Foundation and the Jurassic Coast Trust, along with many other charitable trusts, organisations, businesses and individuals.
6. 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, it invests in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK. For more information, go to: <http://www.hlf.org.uk>

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