LIMERICK CITY LIBRARY

King John's castle to get €5m birthday gift

By ANNE SHERIDAN

Pictured at King John's Castle: Dr. Vincent Cunnane, 'King John' (Kieran McAteer), and the Mayor of Limerick Cllr Maria Byrne

NEARLY €6 million has been secured by Shannon Development to help make King John's Castle a 21st century tourist attraction.

The project on the 13th century castle is scheduled to be completed by 2012, which will coincide with the 800th birthday of the castle.

The funding will bring a range of new benefits to the castle, as well as boosting jobs in the short and long term.

Following a detailed submission to Government, a grant of €4.7 million has been approved by Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport under the National Development Plan. The balance of the funding, an estimated €1 million, will be met by Shannon Development.

Dr Vincent Cunnane, chief executive of Shannon Development, said the €5.7m redevelopment of King John's Castle puts a key priority on Limerick city as the centre of a strong Shannon region.

"The essence of the new visitor experience at King John's Castle is to make the castle itself the core attraction, boosted by living interpretation and re-enactment," he said.

A wide range of new technologies and specialist multi-media techniques will be used to bring the Castle's development and historical events to life. Improved exhibition and visitor facilities are also promised under the works.

Fiona Monaghan, head of operations for Fáilte Ireland in the west region, said they are delighted to be able to provide funding towards the redevelopment of King John's Castle in the centre of Limerick's medieval quarter.

"We hope this significant investment will go a long way in helping to highlight Limerick's already strong cultural and heritage offering," said Ms Monaghan.

This investment will also help create employment during the construction and fit-out phase of the project and a number of full time staff positions will be created upon completion.

Once complete the new King John's Castle complex will form the focal point for a cluster of tourism developments within Limerick's Mediaeval Quarter which also includes, Limerick City Museum, St Mary's Cathedral, the Hunt Museum, Bishops Palace, Treaty Stone and O'Callaghan and Clancy Strands.

Shannon Development said they will continue to work together with Limerick City Council and the Limerick Regeneration agencies to carry out improvements in the Nicholas Street area.

Dr Cunnane said with Limerick receiving the coveted title of European City of Sport for 2011, this will open up "huge potential in terms of long term economic benefits for the city, and it complements Shannon Development's efforts to promote Limerick as a world renowned sports, tourism and business destination."

Deputy Willie O'Dea welcomed the announcement of funding, which is hoped will boost tourist numbers to 100,000 visitors annually.

Fine Gael Cllr Kevin Kiely said the volume of people that visit that area of the city is "unparalleled", due to the clustering of "unrivalled" attractions mentioned above.

Independent Cllr John Gilligan had also urged in the past that while Limerick's attractions "won't be competing with the Louvre in Paris" an upgrade of some of the city's attractions is greatly needed.