

New facilities aim to bring more visitors to County Durham castle

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A development plan that aims to open up one of the North East's most historic buildings has been unveiled.

The plans for Raby Castle, in [County Durham](#), aim to create new event spaces, dining venues and redesigned gardens.

Owners Lord and Lady Barnard hope the plans, which have developed over the last three years, will boost the visitor experience of the castle, park and gardens, while securing its future for the community.

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The plans agreed by Durham County Council last December aim to restore and preserve historic buildings within the park and gardens, which have lain unused for decades.

The development – called The Rising – will also provide contemporary spaces to enjoy, giving new uses to heritage buildings while also introducing structures to host events and exhibition spaces, retail and dining experiences and a visitor information hub – which will all be available without having to pay an entry fee.

Newly designed walled gardens, soft landscaping, and new entrance car park also form part of the plans, which Lord Barnard said will reposition Raby Castle Park and Gardens as a historical and cultural asset which local communities can be proud of.

Lord Barnard, whose family home is Raby Castle, said he has been determined to make the historic landmark an enjoyable and accessible haven for visitors since his tenure began five years ago.

He said: "The feeling was that Raby Castle and Park has been a visitor attraction for a long time and visitors even since the 18th Century have come here, but somehow it seemed to me that Raby was still very much under the radar, and it has a huge amount to share.

"One of the first things we did was change the paywall, so visitors could enjoy the facilities as well as part of the castle grounds without having to buy a ticket, which felt to us like a much more welcoming experience.



CGI of The Rising development
(Image: Raby Castle)



CGI of the Coach House within The Rising development
(Image: Raby Castle)

“So, our motivation for this scheme is to really open up the castle and the estate to a great many more people to enjoy. Raby Castle is the flagship of the dale and we wanted to create something that would make people really proud, where they can bring their friends and family and enjoy everything we have to offer.

“If you’d arrived in the 1970s, you’d have thought it was a nice place for a cup of tea – that was fine for then, but now it’s time to move on. We felt, apart from opening up the castle’s potential, we also really needed to look after people in a better way as well.

“So, the new Vinery café and restaurant will provide what we hope will be an attractive place to enjoy good food with a stunning view of the castle in the foreground, before taking a stroll through the new Duchess Walk – and all without having to pay for castle entry.”

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The first phase will also see the creation of a children's adventure play area to the north of the castle, on the site of the present Christmas tree plantation. The playground attraction, planned to be open for Easter 2022, will include a refreshment kiosk with a stargazing deck on the roof.

The renovation and development of The Rising will be take two years of a five-year business plan – bringing together a programme of conservation, restoration, repair and upgrades to

historic buildings such as Gainford Hall, Raby Castle Park & Gardens, Unthank, Spring Hill Cottage, The Scar Farm, Bowlees Farm, Beck Foot Farm and Hilton Hall.

Lord Barnard added: “With a new generation it is time for a new beginning, and we want to make sure that Raby is preserved for future generations to enjoy as well as our own.

“It is a huge project because of the number of beautiful and significant buildings within The Rising development – we couldn’t just have picked off bits and left the rest because these historic buildings would just have decayed beyond repair.

“I have memories of these buildings from my childhood, such as heaving bales of hay into the Dutch Barn when I was working on the farm during the summer but really these buildings haven’t had a lot of use for 50 years. It’s really time to bring them back to life for a wider audience to enjoy.”

Duncan Peake, Raby’s CEO said: “This is a new era for Raby Castle, Park and Gardens allied not only to the opportunities presented by the introduction of high-quality new housing in Staindrop and Gainford, but also to a stated ambition by Raby Estates to greatly increase visitor engagement with the castle and gardens, heightening awareness and understanding of the heritage building and appreciating its value as a vital cultural landmark.”

Phase one will begin later this year and the project is due to be completed in 2023 when it will open to the public.

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