

Britain's most important Roman town saved for the nation

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National Heritage Memorial Fund steps in to secure the future of the internationally important Roman town of Venta Icenorum in Norfolk.

Image



View of the site of Venta Icenorum

Today, the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) is delighted to announce a grant of £374,000 to enable the Norfolk Archaeological Trust (NAT) to purchase part of the buried Roman town of Venta Icenorum at Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk.

This rare greenfield survival of a Roman capital was at high risk of permanent damage as a result of farming and unauthorised metal detecting. It has now been saved for the nation thanks to this crucial grant along with generous support from English Heritage and South Norfolk Council.

Venta Icenorum is just one of three Roman regional centres in Britain that remains not built over, including Silchester in Hampshire and Wroxeter Roman City in Shropshire. The lack of development on the 55 acre site currently being purchased means it provides an exceptionally rare opportunity to study how the Romans lived and understand the changes that occurred in urban centres across Britain and Europe after the fall of Rome. There is strong evidence that Venta

Icenorum was occupied into the Anglo-Saxon period, demonstrating a length of occupation unlike that of Silchester and Wroxeter, and therefore of exceptional importance for the history of Roman Britain.

In addition to NHMF's grant, English Heritage contributed £40,000; South Norfolk Council provided £20,000; and the remainder came from the Archaeological Trust's own resources.

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of NHMF, commented: "This is wonderful news. Venta Icenorum offers a rare and exciting insight into our Roman and Anglo-Saxon past. Now thanks to this National Heritage Memorial Fund grant it will be safeguarded giving future generations of archaeologists, students and visitors the opportunity to unlock its secrets."

Venta Icenorum straddled both sides of the River Tas and was the Roman capital of both Norfolk and Suffolk. The Norfolk Archaeological Trust already owns part of the Roman town to the east of the river. The newly purchased land to the west, which was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument by English Heritage in January 2011, will now be reconnected to the town and operate as an entire archaeological site that is freely accessible to the public.

Peter Wade-Martins, Director of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, commented: "I am absolutely delighted that the Trust has managed to acquire this vitally important part of the Roman town which is a significant addition to the 120 acres already under our conservation management."

Dr. Will Fletcher, English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Norfolk, said: "We recognise this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to safeguard an important part of our nation's heritage for the future. We believe this site is at significant risk and our grant will go towards protecting this valuable Roman town."

South Norfolk Councillor David Goldson, who chairs the panel which approved the grant said: "We are pleased to support this most worthwhile project and delighted that our contribution has triggered a much larger grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund to secure this important treasure for the people of South Norfolk and the nation."

Notes to editors

English Heritage

English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the historic environment. It provides advice on how best to conserve England's heritage for the benefit of everyone. While most of England's heritage is in private hands, it works with all who come into contact with it - landowners, businesses, planners and developers, national, regional and local government, the Third Sector, local communities and the general public - to help them understand, value, care for and enjoy England's historic environment.

It is also entrusted with the custodianship of over 400 sites and monuments which together form the national collection of built and archaeological heritage. These include some of the most important monuments of human history such as Stonehenge and Hadrian's Wall.

South Norfolk Council

Caistor Roman Town is managed in partnership with South Norfolk Council. The management, use and future development of the site for cultural heritage purposes is guided by the Caistor Joint Advisory Board comprising representatives from the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, South Norfolk Council, Norfolk County Council, the Parochial Church Council and Caistor Parish Council. Members of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service and English Heritage also sit on the Joint Advisory Board. It is open 365 days of the year and is free of charge.

Further information

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