



FIGHT TO DEATH: The Battle of Prestonpans, painted by David Marjoribanks, is on the wall of the Dasher pub in the town. Campaigners want the historic site preserved

Battle begins for £5m centre

Campaign for visitor base at site of Bonnie Prince Charlie victory

■ JONATHAN LESSWARE

A £5 MILLION national visitor centre is being planned by community leaders to safeguard a historic Lothians battleground.

The centre, which would be similar to the one at Culloden, would be built on the site of the 1745 Battle of Prestonpans, in East Lothian.

The plans would see the construction of a new "interpretation centre" and the site restored to how it was during the battle.

The area has been identified as one of the most endangered battle sites in Scotland. Currently, it is marked by a small plaque, with no signs from the nearby A1.

But campaigners say the farmed field, where troops led by Bonnie Prince Charlie routed the army loyal to King George II during the second Jacobite rising, should have a permanent centre.



BID: Gordon Prestoungrange

The plans are being led by Dr Gordon Prestoungrange, the Baron of Prestoungrange. The full details are expected to be revealed in September.

Dr Prestoungrange said they had still not looked at how to fund the project but suggested a ballpark figure of £5m.

He pointed out that the Culloden Battlefield Memorial Centre is currently undergoing a £7m redevelopment and has received money from the Scottish Executive and European Rural Development

Fund. The Prestonpans project may also look at applying for National Lottery funding.

Earlier this year Alexander Bennett, the Culloden project's co-ordinator, visited the former coal-mining village and offered advice on their plans.

Dr Prestoungrange said: "It's just too important to the nation to be left unmarked, or worse, to be destroyed by further development."

"By September 21, the battle's 261st anniversary, we will have a major plan for a year-round interpretation centre on the site. We want to get lots of visitors who will come along and enjoy the interpretation centre."

"We also want somewhere where local youngsters can come and learn about what happened their doorstep."

Dr Prestoungrange said nine Highland chieftains, whose clans took part in the battle, had agreed to be patrons of the project.

He added: "The battle is unanimously viewed as an event of great importance, not only in the '45 campaign but also in demonstrating many human virtues and aspirations. The significance was huge. It was not just a nine-minute battle but showed Bonnie Prince Charlie was heading south."

The battlefield lies on land owned by local farmers and ScottishPower, which owns nearby Cockenzie Power Station.

Local historian Peter MacKenzie said: "The battle plays a major role in Scottish literature and it is important we recognise this."

The project will now seek the backing of the local authority conservation groups and the Executive. Prestonpans Community

Council and East Lothian Provost Pat O'Brien, who is the local councillor, are behind the project.

A spokeswoman for Historic Scotland said: "If at any point the people behind this want to speak to Historic Scotland our area teams will be happy to hear from them or meet with them."

A report by the UK Battlefield Trust for Historic Scotland at the end of 2005 identified Prestonpans as one of the most endangered battle sites in Scotland.

The site was also featured in the 2005 BBC series Battlefield Britain.

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THE FACTS

The Battle of Prestonpans, on September 21, 1745, was the first

significant conflict in the second Jacobite Rising.

The Jacobite army loyal to James Francis Edward Stuart and led by his son Charles Edward Stuart - Bonnie Prince Charlie - defeated a largely inexperienced army loyal to George II and led by Sir John Cope.



Having taken Edinburgh with little or no fighting five days before, Charles' army met Cope's forces at Prestonpans.

At the crack of dawn, 1400 Highlanders charged and Cope's forces fled.

The battle was over in five minutes with hundreds of Cope's troops killed or wounded and 1500 captured. The Highlanders suffered only around 100 dead or wounded.