DKI Fire and SMS technology ensure historic former royal castle is fully protected

Leeds Castle near Maidstone in Kent is one of the country’s most picturesque visitor attractions, boasting a thousand years of history and bursting with royal connections.

Built in the 1200s, the original castle, which is surrounded by a large moat, was a royal residence for 300 years and the property of six medieval queens.

It was rebuilt in the 1820s and having been a private residence for centuries, in the 1970s it was handed to the charitable trust which now runs it.

The castle has since developed into a successful tourist attraction and venue for weddings, conferences and exhibitions.

Fire protection for the site had, however, become excessively prone to false alarms, particularly on account of the build-up of dust which is inevitable in historic properties with high ceilings. Insects were also triggering some of the devices, causing considerable disruption to staff investigating the cause of the alerts.

To resolve these problems, DKI Fire Protection of Ditton were contracted to upgrade and install new systems and smoke sensors covering the castle and its associated complex of old buildings. The company has been trading since 2005 and had previously undertaken maintenance work at the famous location.

DKI chose to install an SMS SenTRI system, consisting of three SenTRI Four panels and approximately 400 new SenTRI detection devices. One of the panels from the pre-existing system was found to be working well and was retained with an upgrade as part of the new network.

The new system took six weeks to install, with some early morning working necessary in areas where the public have access. Most of the detection devices are SenTRI combined optical and heat sensors, along with a smaller number of optical-heat detectors with sounders. Heat detection was used in the kitchen of the Fairfax Hall – a 17th Century timber frame barn which is a restaurant sometimes used for functions.

The programmable nature of the SenTRI technology allowed for pre-alarm delays to be incorporated into the system, allowing staff alerted by a paging system to investigate the cause of the alarm state. The four panels are linked to work as one system, with the main panel being located in the estate office, where monitoring is conducted during the day. Other panels are in the Gatehouse, which is monitored during the night, in the Castle itself and in the 16th Century stone-built Maiden’s Tower.

“This was an easy replacement system to install,” said Steve Ives, director of DKI Fire. “There were no alterations and we were able to work more or less uninterrupted.

“We are an SMS Regional Approved Distributor and SMS SenTRI equipment is our preferred choice. It is very reliable and flexible and allows for easy programming so you can adapt it to the circumstances of each location. It is also very cost-effective.”