

National Lottery funding to save 'at risk' Walthamstow church

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St Peter-in-the-Forest is to be remodelled so it can be used more widely by the local community. Does this church hold the key to the future survival of other historic places of worship?

The parish church of St Peter-in-the-Forest, Walthamstow, is partly falling down and currently languishing on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register'. But could this pretty, yet unassuming church, nestled on the edge of Epping Forest, hold the key to the future survival of hundreds, or even thousands, of other historic places of worship?

It's a big claim. But this week it was announced that St Peter's is to receive £1.3million of National Lottery investment.

The money will address urgent structural issues resulting from a post-war extension breaking away from the building's west end and damaging the 1880s interior. But, what is perhaps most interesting about this project is that the investment will remodel the church building, creating three flexible spaces on two floors that can be used more widely by the local community.

A place for the whole community

This isn't a conversion of a redundant church. In fact, the congregation at St Peter's is very active. But what they have recognised and what this project aims to deliver, is a church that can be used better by the congregation and the wider community in order to secure it for the future.

[quote=Ros Kerslake, HLF CEO]"This ambitious and innovative project at St Peter's is pioneering a new future for these wonderful spaces."[/quote]

The money will create new spaces that will offer better facilities for worship and activities based around acting, filmmaking, arts, crafts and forest activities. The building will also feature a community café which can be rented for community activities and for the provision of an annual festival 'the Forestival', which will bring in income.

It's a forward-looking project and the team at St Peter's are thinking creatively about how they can maximise the potential of this wonderful building. It's one to watch - particularly for any experiences that could be shared with similar historic places of worship.

A creative enterprise

The vicar of the parish, Fr Paul Trathen, explained why there are exciting times ahead. "This is tremendously good news for our community, here in Walthamstow, and beyond," he said.

[quote=Fr Paul Trathen]"The coming years and decades will be ones in which a great variety of creative community enterprises are initiated and sustained, alongside the church's primary role as a place for worship."[/quote]

"With the assistance of this major, National Lottery grant, we can now help ensure that the coming years and decades will be ones in which a great variety of creative community enterprises are initiated and sustained, alongside the church's primary role as a place for worship."

HLF's CEO, Ros Kerslake, explained why this project excited HLF's trustees. "National Lottery funding will not only save this at-risk church but it will encourage more people to use and enjoy it! This ambitious and innovative project at St Peter's is pioneering a new future for these wonderful spaces."



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