The Guidhall Heritage Centre Project wins HLF support

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The project aims to return the Guildhall to widespread public use after a programme of conservation and renovation works.

Development funding of £73,600 has beeen awarded to help the consortium progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later stage.

The Guildhall is widely believed to be the oldest civic building in England, having served the community continuously for over eight centuries. It has been a meeting house, a court of law, an infirmary, and many other things in between. During the Second World War it became a regional headquarters for the Royal Observer Corps, a vital operations room supporting the RAF during the Battle of Britain and beyond. In the recent past the building has faded from public view and it is the intention of the project to reverse that trend.

The works programme will be aimed at conserving and interpreting the ancient building so that visitors can appreciate its history and its relationship with the community. The operations room will be presented as it was at the height of the war, a tribute to the many local volunteers who served there. At the same time there will be facilities for hosting collections, staging public and private events, running societies, and learning for all both on site and on our website. It is hoped to forge links with schools and youth groups so that the young can enjoy the centre today and protect it in the future. As a self-sustaining centre it will be largely run by volunteers who will have the chance to immerse themselves in the history and the atmosphere while giving valued service to the many visitors.

Councillor John Griffiths, the Leader of St Edmundsbury Council and a Guildhall Feoffee, said: “Bury St Edmunds glories in remarkable buildings but they also need a purpose, a life, to be truly appreciated by everyone. I am absolutely delighted about this funding which will allow the exciting vision for the Guildhall’s future to be brought nearer to fulfilment, and would like to thank all those involved.”

Henry Saltmarsh, Chair of the Guildhall Feoffment said: “The Feoffees, who hold the Guildhall for the community, are delighted with this development that is for the benefit of local society as was originally intended by the town's early benefactors.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “This is an amazing building with 800 years’ worth of stories to tell. We look forward to receiving the detailed plans for this project.”