Coming to a billboard near you – the history of Smethwick

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The dramatic project has been made possible by a grant of £24,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Young Roots programme.

The North Smethwick Development Trust will manage the scheme that sees local young people delving into the history of the area from the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s to the present day.

In an area with high levels of deprivation the project, which is being funded under the HLF's Young Roots programme, is seen as a way of forging a new sense of community by emphasising the proud past, much of which has been obscured by regeneration schemes.

Anne Jenkins, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "This is a project that will reach across age groups and different cultures to shine a light onto the past and then present its discoveries in a vibrant and unmissable way."

The neighbourhood is close to the Soho Foundry where Boulton and Watt built some of the earliest steam engines. Then there's the Galton Valley Canal which first opened in 1769 and was developed by the country's leading engineers such as James Brindley, John Smeaton and Thomas Telford.

North Smethwick was once the home of manufacturing and textile industries and older members of the present community still recall some of the local companies, including the Chance factory that supplied glass around the world.

The young people involved in the project will select different aspects of local heritage, carry out research with professional help, and discuss with an artist how they can illustrate their findings as a major piece of visual art. This will be displayed on a public hoarding measuring more than 300 ft in length and sited on the corner of Lewisham Road and Mafekin Road in Smethwick. They will also video the project as it progresses producing a DVD that will be made available to local people and organisations.

For North Smethwick Development Trust Chief Executive Sue Howarth, said: "The Heritage Lottery funding offers a great opportunity for young people in the area to scratch away at the surface and find out about their heritage whilst showing everyone what an important place Smethwick is."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 30,000 projects, allocating over £4.5billion across the UK, including £319million to projects in the West Midlands alone.

Further information

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