A new future for Dunston Staiths

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The enormous wooden Dunston Staiths in Gateshead, that once played a crucial role in the transport of millions of tons of Tyneside coal, is to be brought back into public use following a crucial grant of £418,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), it was announced today.

The project will enable the:

- restoration of a significant section of the Staiths
- reconnection of the staiths with the surrounding saltmarsh and wider natural heritage allowing people to fully appreciate these special habitats
- interpretation of the sites rich history, telling the story of the staiths fully for the first time
- creation of a two-year education project for local schools
- a youth engagement programme, working with local youth groups and youth workers, encouraging young people to learn from and enjoy the site
- enhanced safety features to promote public access
- a series of public events opening up the staiths to the public for the first time

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are delighted to be helping bring the nationally important Dunston Staiths back to life for the benefit of local people. As one of the last remaining timber structures in the UK, their heritage importance cannot be denied. It’s great to know that our funding will not only mean conserving the impressive wooden structure but it will also help the surrounding natural environment to thrive and open the site up to more local people than ever before.”

Trust Manager of Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust, Martin Hulse, said: “The Staiths are an iconic symbol of the region’s industrial heritage. Crucial to their survival is to create public access onto the top deck of the structure. The trust has also placed a large emphasis on engagement with the local community and in particular local schools.”

English Heritage’s Planning and Conservation Director for the North East, Graham Saunders, said: “It’s fantastic news that the HLF is to support the revitalisation of this fascinating structure, which is both a scheduled monument and a Grade II listed building. English Heritage is delighted the HLF is able to build on the £193,842 of grant aid awarded by English Heritage over the past two years which has been vital to project development work at the staiths and helped make it ready for the major scheme announced today."

The partnership behind this project includes Durham Wildlife Trust, Gateshead Council and English Heritage. These organisations have been working for ten years to achieve this success.

Match funding is crucial to these projects and funding has already been secured from English Heritage, LEAF (Local Environment Action Fund), Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. public donations of £1,800 was also crucial to show local support for the project.

The 130-year old staiths is now reckoned to be the largest timber structure in Britain, a title it also held when built by the North Eastern Railway at a cost of £210,000. Constructed of pitch pine the staiths shipped over 1.5million tons of coal in

its first year alone and peaked at almost 4million tons a year in 1939.

Downturn in coal trade meant that by 1973 coal shipments were down to 400,000 tons and in 1977 coal shipments ceased. The staiths were officially closed in 1980 and a later attempt to reopen them failed. The structure found a new role as one of the centre pieces of the Gateshead Garden Festival in 1990 but its deteriorating condition and two major fires has since left the structure closed and with an uncertain future. Opportunities for public access have been limited to a small number of organised visits.

Notes to editors

The Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust (TWBPT) was established to preserve the architectural heritage of Tyne and Wear through the repair, conservation and regeneration of their historic buildings. TWBPT is one of many such buildings preservation trusts in the UK.

The Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust is a charity registered with the Charity Commission (no. 509133) and is recognised as an incorporated charity.

The trust's role is to preserve buildings, structures and land in and around Tyne and Wear of particular beauty, historical, architectural or constructional interest. The aims of the company are:

- to work with communities to protect and restore buildings and sites of significant local interest
- to help raise public awareness of the trust's work through events such as the Heritage Open Days and provide opportunities where possible for the public to view and enjoy those buildings and structures

Further information

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