Lottery investment to unlock commercial potential of Inverness temperance hall

11/10/2013

Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) gave its initial support to a project which will transform the vacant and at risk Merkinch Welfare Hall in Inverness into a vibrant community space. The only listed temperance hall in the Highlands, this rare building will be restored to house an amateur boxing club, an easily accessible centre for people requiring employment support, and much-needed office space.

Merkinch Welfare Hall is the first project in Scotland to be awarded funding through HLF's new Heritage Enterprise scheme. It received a first-round pass for a grant of £706,400 including a development grant of £50,000.

Heritage Enterprise addresses 'market failure' - where buildings have previously failed to attract investment or realise their commercial potential because the cost of repair has meant that - until now - they were not commercially viable. The Heritage Lottery investment announced today bridges that financial gap. It will specifically help fund vital repairs and conservation works to the building, converting it into a safe, usable and inspirational space for new businesses. By doing so, the Lottery grant helps remove one of the key obstacles currently standing in the way of regeneration by transforming the neglected historic building into a productive enterprise that will create local jobs and generate wealth.

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "Merkinch Welfare Hall was once at the heart of the local community but now stands empty and neglected. Whilst much-loved, its restoration presents huge financial challenges. This new scheme works to unlock the potential of these precious old buildings, encouraging private investors and encouraging regeneration. The result is good for us all – substantial economic growth, much-needed new jobs and a wonderful part of our heritage saved from further neglect."

Colin Downie, Chief Executive of Merkinch Enterprise, added: "Merkinch Enterprise seems to have been working towards this end for such a long time and now, with this necessary support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are at last close to realizing our long term dream to bring the hall back into community use. It is still somewhere in hopefully, the not too distant future, however, the eventual refurbishment of the hall will certainly transform the heart of the Merkinch community whilst also providing a much needed boost in the pride of the local community.

"It's been derelict for such a long time to now be in a position to regenerate the building, is a privilege not only me but to the board of the Enterprise and all who have been involved in getting us to this exciting stage in the process. I'm more than confident that we'll achieve our long term aim for the building and transform it back into community use by this organisation for and on behalf of the Merkinch Community."

Built in 1914 to house a temperance group who sought to attract young men away from the dangers of alcohol in the years leading up to the Second World War, Merkinch Welfare Hall currently stands vacant and on the Buildings at Risk register due to serious water ingress and resultant damp. A key building in the townscape of Merkinch, the hall played a central role in the local community over the past 100 years as a home to Clachnacuddin FC and Inverness Judo club as well as other uses such as dentistry for servicemen. It will now return to its sporting and community roots as an amateur boxing club and office space for Merkinch Partnership. The redevelopment is a partnership between the Merkinch Enterprise - a charitable company set up to alleviate poverty in Merkinch, the Inverness City Amateur Boxing club, and

the Merkinch Partnership which is funded by the Highland Council Deprived Area Fund and the Scottish Government.

Heritage Enterprise launched with the publication of the first ever comprehensive analysis of how businesses across the UK use historic buildings. *New ideas need old buildings* revealed the positive impact historic buildings have on the UK's economy and their proven ability to contribute to growth. The key findings of the analysis demonstrated a commercial business based in a historic building generates more wealth than is the average for the UK economy as a whole.

For more information about Heritage Enterprise visit Heritage Enterprise programme page. Twitter: #heritageenterprise.

Notes to editors

New ideas need old buildings
This research was commissioned by the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. The analysis of business use within listed buildings was undertaken by Colliers International, using data supplied by ProMap, with further work on economic impacts undertaken by Oxford Economics. The market research survey of businesses occupying listed buildings was carried out by Spirul Research. HLF is also grateful to Historic Scotland, Cadw and Dept Environment Northern Ireland for supplying data on listed buildings.

The research was carried out in five steps
• Establishing the types of businesses that occupy a large sample of listed buildings in 62 towns and cities across the UK.

- Comparing these uses with the pattern of use within non-listed buildings– both across the UK and within each of the sample places. This gave us our key measure used in the analysis – the 'propensity to occupy' indicator. This compares the frequency that listed buildings are occupied by different types of business, with the frequency in non-listed buildings.
- Using reasonable assumptions to aggregate up from this sample to give estimates of the total number of different types of business occupying all listed buildings.
- Using economic data on business classification to generate estimates of the total output and employment that is generated by businesses occupying listed building.
- Undertaking a telephone survey of over 200 businesses in listed buildings in 15 different locations showed why the patterns of use described above materialise.

Heritage Enterprise applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

Further information and images

Images: A photograph of Colin Downie, Chief Executive of Merkinch Enterprise with local MSP, Fergus Ewing, is being taken outside the building on Friday 11 October 2013. If you would like a copy please contact Colin Downie or Natasha Hughes on the number below.

Comment: For additional comment on the project, the following Councillors can be contacted:
Cllr Janet Campbell on 01463 226 598
Cllr Richard Laird on 07557 566 552.

Heritage Lottery Fund: Please contact Natasha Hughes or Alison Scott, HLF Press Office, on 020 7591 6143 / 6032. Out of hours mobile: 07973 613 820.

Merkinch Enterprise: Please contact Colin Downie on 01463 240 085.



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Carole Souter and Nicky Dunn at the Harland and Wolff drawing offices

Lottery investment to unlock commercial potential of five unused historic buildings