Lottery cash to bring new life to landmark building

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The £1.15million scheme aims to repair the unusual building in Cemetery Road, Lye – comprised of identical Anglican and non-conformist chapels – and bring them back into sustainable community and commercial use.

The trust expects to carry out the necessary building repairs and conversion work in 2014.

Based on consultations during work to develop plans for the project, learning and heritage-based activities will be introduced as part of the refurbishment work and will continue after the building works are complete.

The chapels are closely linked to the cemetery and its burials, and the past and present communities of the Lye and Wollescote area. Planned trails around the cemetery, booklets, display materials, schools resources and a website are amongst the list of activities to be introduced, to provide print based and on-line public access to information about the building, its history and the conservation project.

The local landmark building and beauty spot, originally designed in the style of a Victorian landscaped park, is a rare surviving example of two chapels within a single building. The site which is currently owned by Dudley Council was severely at risk due to lack of use, when volunteers at the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust stepped in to save the historic building.

HLF funding will enable the trust to take full ownership of the building under an arrangement called ‘asset transfer’, with this being an important pilot project supported by the council.

Chairman of the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust, Bob Tolley, said: “We’re thrilled that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support and excited to be able to deliver our scheme to save this important building because it means so much to local people. It has been a focus for the trust for a number of years and that we are now able to bring our plans to fruition is testament to the hard work and dedication of many people, not least our late Chairman Alan Smith MBE. The trust is working on other projects too and we are hopeful this will mark the start of a productive period over the coming twelve months.”

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: “We are delighted to award this grant, which will enable the restoration of two rare, and remarkably complete, Grade II listed identical Anglican and Non-Conformist chapels, closed for at least 20 years. This is an excellent project demonstrating how Lottery funding can bring derelict buildings back into sustainable use for the greater benefit of the community.”

Councillor Pete Lowe, Deputy Leader at Dudley Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, said: “We are delighted that funding has been secured through the Heritage Lottery Fund to move this exciting project forward. I have visited the cemetery chapels on many occasions and through our partnership with the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust and HLF we now look forward to a bright future for this locally significant building.”

Margot James, MP for Stourbridge, said: “I am delighted that the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust is receiving over £1million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This money will allow the trust to restore the Lye and Wollescote Cemetery Chapels and secure the future of these wonderful buildings for many years to come. I am also thrilled that the trust is planning on using some of the money for community activities, display materials, and school resources. The

chapels are a treasured local landmark and we should commend the trust on their hard work in securing this funding."

Notes to editors

The West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust (WMHBT) is a registered charity, established in 1985, with specialists in the field of building conservation giving their time on a voluntary basis to serve as trustees and funds coming from membership subscriptions. WMHBT's purpose is to safeguard buildings within the West Midlands that are of historical or architectural importance. Where this cannot be achieved by simply raising awareness to the issues, WMHBT will consider carrying out a conservation project itself. As a registered Building Preservation Trust, WMHBT is able to attract grants and low-cost loans to carry out the type of rescue scheme often necessary with 'Buildings at Risk' and in this way aims to cover the deficit in funding such projects.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in safeguarding historic buildings. WMHBT organises a range of activities, focused on the West Midlands, which include a regular newsletter; specialist talks, events and visits to historic buildings; arranging public access (as appropriate) to buildings before, during and after repair; commissioning and publishing research into historic buildings; encouraging the involvement of schools and colleges in conservation projects; and disseminating information.

The first WMHBT project was 19-20 High Street, Kinver, South Staffordshire, a timber-frame building listed Grade II. In the Staffordshire volume of *The Buildings of England* series, the late Nikolaus Pevsner states that in Kinver High Street the best houses are numbers 17-20.

To have lost an important building within that range would have been a tragedy, but when the WMHBT took the building over it was in a dangerous condition, with parts close to collapse. By that stage no-one was prepared to take up the arrears of maintenance because it would have cost more than the market value to put it right.

As a result of the WMHBT project, 19-20 High Street has been transformed into a comfortable four-bedroom home and is now occupied by new owners. The high standards of the work were recognised by two awards: The Carpenters' Award presented by English Heritage in recognition of "the sensitivity of approach and excellence of craftsmanship"; and a "mention" by the Civic Trust for its "worthy contribution to the community".

The second WMHBT project was the Grade II listed office building built as a living showcase by the former Harris and Pearson Company, firebrick manufacturers, in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill, West Midlands. The building had been unoccupied for 13 years and was in a derelict state when acquired by WMHBT, with the costs of repair again being in excess of market value.

The building was converted for modern-day use as prestigious offices and materials produced to interpret the associated heritage stories (see Harrison and Peasron website). The project was a regional finalist in the RICS Awards, a national finalist in the Brick Awards, and was awarded a Civic Trust awards "commendation".

Both of the above projects were made possible by tremendous local community and local authority support and financial assistance from several sources, including primarily the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Architectural

Further details about the Lye and Wollescote Cemetery Chapels restoration project can be found at the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapels' website.

Further information

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Supporting information such as photographs and artists impressions are available on request.