Museum of Lancashire to benefit from £2m upgrade

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Seven interactive galleries along with new visitor facilities such as a shop, café and improved access for disabled people are just some of the new facilities that will be on offer at the Museum of Lancashire when an extensive renovation is completed in May 2011.

The refurbishment, which will also include improved lighting, new windows and cleaning of the stonework, is expected to get underway in April 2010 and to be completed in May 2011.

The upgrade to the Preston-based museum has been made possible following a successful application for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Fund have awarded the museum a grant of £919,400, which will be matched by investment by Lancashire County Council of £811,147.

CC Mike Calvert, Lancashire County Council's cabinet member for Adult and Community Services is looking forward to visiting the museum when it reopens. He said: "The new museum will be a superb facility which the people of Lancashire can be proud of.

"The plans for the museum are truly inspiring. I am particularly looking forward to the New atmospheric walk through the World War 1 trench with its sounds, smells and film.

"Visitors will also be able to see objects that have never been on display before such as the Bourne Casket, sweet machine, and other iconic items from around the region."

CC David Smith, Lancashire County Council's lead member for community services, added: "CC Calvert is right, when it reopens, the museum will be a facility which everyone in Lancashire can be truly proud of.

"I would like to congratulate everyone at the museum, the county council and other partner agencies for putting forward an excellent bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. I would also like to thank staff at the Fund for their help and for supporting our exciting plans."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: “The Museum collection here provides a wonderful insight into Lancashire’s history and cultural heritage. With HLF’s support, this project restore the historic elements of the museum building, whilst redeveloping the galleries and improving access to the museum. This will dramatically improve opportunities for visitors to learn about and enjoy the collections, both now and for generations to come.”

Other plans for the museum include developing community engagement opportunities. A new community outreach officer will be appointed to work with local community groups to enable them to contribute directly into the new displays and to interpret objects that have meaning for them

It is also planned for the museum to act as a means of signposting heritage sites across Lancashire, such as the theme of Lancashire at work. This will tie in with Helmshore and Queen Street Mill Textile Museums, Lancaster Maritime and Fleetwood Museums and The British Commercial Vehicle Museum.

Notes to editors

The Museum is housed in the Grade II listed former Preston Quarter Sessions House building. Built between 1825 and 1828 this building replaced the earlier courthouse situated within the neighbouring House of Correction. This building was felt to be too small and so on the 9th September 1824 justices decided to spend £10,000 building a new court house outside of the walls of the prison. The Birmingham company Rickman and Hutchison, were employed to design and build the court house. The building opened in 1828 but was not fully completed until the following year.

By the 1880s it was felt that the location of the court house was inappropriate and should be relocated to the town centre. Court sessions continued to be held in the building until the opening of the new sessions house on Lancaster Road in 1900. In 1911 the building became the headquarters of a Territorial Unit of the Royal Artillery until 1958. Between 1958 and 1961 the building was converted to offices for the vehicle taxation department.

The building was taken over by Lancashire County Council and after extensive renovations opened as a museum in 1987.

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 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.