# Green light for Norton Priory

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Norton Priory is the best excavated monastic site in Europe and this project aims to preserve and restore the 12th-century priory undercroft, exhibit the full breadth of the museum's extensive collections and interpret the site's 900 year history.

With HLF support the site can, for the first time, fully realise its potential as a tourist destination in Cheshire as well as continuing locally with its many community programmes within Runcorn.

Development funding of £255,213 has been awarded to help Norton Priory Museum & Gardens progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date. These plans will include essential conservation work on the priory ruins and a sympathetically designed new museum. Exhibition space will be increased by 60% and delicate and valuable items that are impossible to show in the current museum will be displayed for the first time. Improved education and community services will better facilitate visits from schools and local groups while interpretation and better orientation around Norton Priory's 47 acre site will draw together the history of the Priory and the later Tudor, Georgian and Victorian stories encapsulated in the 18th century walled garden, meadows and Loggia.

Paul Mathews, Chairman of the Trustees of Norton Priory, said: "This grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund will herald a new phase in the history of the Museum and will give us the resources to transform the visitor experience and the contribution we can make to the local community building on the good practice already established by staff and volunteers. It will mean several years of hard work and enthusiastic fundraising which will lead to Norton Priory Museum realising its full potential."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "We are delighted to be giving our initial support to this precious and historic site in the heart of Runcorn. By restoring the undercroft and improving the existing museum facilities, this project will make the most of the Priory's important collection and ensure that everyone can learn from and enjoy the site's 900 year history. We are looking forward to seeing these plans progress over the coming months."

Norton Priory Museum & Gardens as it is now known was founded as a priory in 1115. Following its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1536, it became the home of the Brooke family for over 400 years. It was not until 1985 after ten years of the most complete archaeological excavations of a monastic site in Europe that the museum first opened its doors to visitors. 2015, when the new museum is expected to have been built, will coincide with the Priory's 900th birthday and will be a wonderful and fitting celebration of this ancient pedigree.

Today, with funding and support from Halton Borough Council Norton Priory welcomes more than 32,000 visitors a year including 8,000 school children. Multi award-winning, it is also home to an extraordinary Georgian Walled Garden, orchards, woodland walks and sculpture trail. It operates only with the invaluable support of Halton Borough Council, working in partnership to deliver numerous community programmes and engaging diverse audiences within the Borough as well as attracting tourism to the region

**Notes to editors**

*A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to

deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

**Further information**

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