Plans to restore iconic Dalkeith building wins Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland support

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The Dalkeith Corn Exchange, which has been vacant for a number of years, is set to be turned into offices by Melville Housing Association, Midlothian's largest registered social landlord, and also host a new Dalkeith Museum that will be managed by the Dalkeith History Society. The museum will have its own entrance and be fully accessible to the public.

The reception area of Melville's new office will also be open to the public and have a permanent exhibition of the history of the Corn Exchange and be a focal point for the proposed Dalkeith Heritage Trail. In addition, the original boardroom of the old Corn Exchange will be available for community meetings and events.

Melville has been awarded first-round pass from HLF and development funding of £48,800 to carry out feasibility work in order to submit a full grant application later this year. If this subsequent funding request is successful, work should begin later in 2013 and be completed the following year.

Preserving and enhancing the unique character of this Grade A listed building, Melville's plans include discreet, sustainable low carbon technologies such as solar panels and a ground source heat pump to provide power and heating to the renovated building.

Melville also hopes that the project will provide training opportunities in conservation work for unemployed youths participating in the DTHI/CARS (Dalkeith Townscape Heritage Initiative / Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme) training scheme run in conjunction with Edinburgh's Telford College. This training programme was launched in June 2011 with funding from HLF and Historic Scotland. The south elevation of the Corn Exchange requires extensive re-pointing in lime mortar and has been identified as an ideal opportunity for trainees to practice and develop their skills.

Melville also intends employing a full time Heritage Officer for three years to organise community engagement activities and publicity for the project to maximise public interest and involvement. This would include, for example, organising conservation work shops and a dedicated website for the project. Also, assisting Melville and the Dalkeith History Society with research and publicity for its exhibitions.

There is a great deal of public support to bring the Corn Exchange back into community use and the plans have been influenced by the 'Dalkeith and Woodburn Locality Plan.' In a film produced by young people (*Dalkeith at a crossroads*), restoration of the Corn Exchange was seen as a key stage in the redevelopment and improvement of the town centre.

The Corn Exchange was the largest indoor grain market in Scotland when opened in 1854 reflecting the long standing importance of Dalkeith as a major market town. It attracted produce from all of southern Scotland, largely due to Dalkeith's close proximity to Edinburgh which was a major consumer. When it opened, the 'Dalkeith Courant' reported that, 'The hall may also be useful to the town as a lecture room or hall room, being in almost all respects the finest as well as the largest building in town.'

Historically, the Corn Exchange has played an extremely important role in the social, political and cultural life of Dalkeith. It has been used for gatherings of all kinds including; balls, banquets, dances, public and political meetings, lectures, cinema, concerts, theatre and exhibitions. Two British Prime Ministers, William Gladstone and Winston Churchill, delivered speeches to large audiences from the internal balcony.

Brian Christie, Chairman of Melville Housing, said: “We’re delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland have given us this support. The Corn Exchange has a long history of community use and is close to the hearts of many local people, especially those who have happy memories of when it was the’ Empress Ballroom’ in the 1940s and 50s where some met their future spouses! We have received overwhelming support for our proposals which will revitalise a building that has played such an important part in the heritage of Midlothian. As well as permanent offices for the Association, the plans for the museum and community use will ensure that the Corn Exchange continues to play a key role in the community”.

Alan Mason, Chairman of Dalkeith History Society, said: " Dalkeith History Society is delighted that the first stage of Melville’s application for funding to repair and restore the Dalkeith Corn Exchange has been successful. The Corn Exchange is an iconic building, of concern to all the citizens of Dalkeith and for over 150 years has been at the centre of the commercial and social life of the town.

We are especially pleased that once restoration is complete, part of the building will be set aside for community use, and that Dalkeith History Society will have the opportunity to use part of that community space as a museum. We have long felt that Dalkeith, which has played such an important part in the history of Scotland, should have a museum worthy of its heritage."

Colin McLean, Head of HLF Scotland, said: “The historic Corn Exchange has played an important role in the social history of Dalkeith for generations but this important listed building has been vacant for many years. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is delighted that our grant will now help progress plans to restore this much loved landmark to regain its rightful position as one the most beautiful buildings in the town and once again open its doors to let local people make full use of the variety of new community facilities planned.”

Martin Ross, Historic Scotland’s Project and Policy Manager, said: “It is really important that we preserve our historic buildings, such as the Corn Exchange in Dalkeith, which form such a vital part of our communities, heritage and streetscape. This is an exciting project and it will be great to see Scotland’s former largest indoor grain market be sustained and transformed into a vital hub for the community.”

Donald Marshall, Chair of the Dalkeith THI/CARS Project Team, said: “The Dalkeith THI/CARS project team is delighted that a new future for the Corn Exchange is now looking very likely. This is such a key historic building in the centre of Dalkeith and represents a proud reminder of the town’s former importance as a trading centre for the surrounding agricultural area. It is a really impressive building with a fine space inside.

The proposed scheme will secure the future of the building and will provide community use and a new museum for the town. The Dalkeith THI/CARS together with a number of partners is developing a heritage trail for the town and with a new museum in the Corn Exchange and the building front being open to the public would be a focal point to the trail. We congratulate Melville Housing Association on their commitment to the town and the success they have had in receiving grant from Historic Scotland and the first round approval from HLF for a significant grant to restore and convert the building.

The design for the scheme is of a high quality, preserving and enhancing the unique character of the building and looking to the future in utilizing renewal sources of energy such as ground source heat pumps and solar panels. The team feel that this will be an exemplar project that has award winning potential and will help to regenerate the town at a critical time in the midst of a recession. We need visionary projects such as this to catch the imagination, conserving our heritage at the same time as looking ahead to the future."

Richard Fairbairn, Chair of the Midlothian Voluntary Action, said: "It is fantastic news that Melville Housing is through to the second stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Corn Exchange has the potential to be the jewel in the crown of Dalkeith's High Street. Midlothian Voluntary Action are delighted that there will be community-run facilities in the redeveloped building, providing a new home for the Dalkeith Museum. Additional community facilities are badly needed in Dalkeith. Congratulations to everyone involved."

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. Melville has received a first-round pPass award of £1,416,400.

On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme. Melville has received a development grant award of £48,800.

Through Historic Scotland's Building Repair Grants Scheme, £83,864 has been awarded to the project. The scheme offers financial assistance to help meet the cost of high-quality repairs using traditional materials and specialist craftsman to conserve original features in buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

Melville Housing Association is a Charitable Registered Social Landlord and the largest registered social landlord in Midlothian. Based in Dalkeith it was formed in 1995 and owns and manages more than 1,860 properties for rent. The Association also plays an active role in delivering and supporting a variety of community projects.

Further information

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