Wilton's gets initial go-ahead for conservation project

29/06/2012

A £56,000 HLF development grant means that Wilton's Music Hall Trust (WMHT) can now work up plans for Phases 2 and 3 of their Capital Project to fully save and conserve the Grade II* listed internationally significant building from ruin, and apply for a full £1.6million HLF grant at a later date.

With 40% of the building currently out of bounds, the building is on the 'At Risk' register and is in a precarious and fragile state. This exciting scheme will bring unseen and unused spaces back to life and make them publically accessible, secure the structure of the building, and develop a wide programme of community and learning activities, so everyone from local school children to businesses to volunteers can get involved in Wilton's revival.

Just 10 minutes from the hustle and bustle of Tower Bridge, it is one of the capital's best-kept secrets – a historic gem much loved by Londoners and visitors alike. Tucked away in the back streets of the East End and created from mismatched terraced houses in the 1850s by entrepreneur John Wilton it is the only intact survivor of the early Grand Music Hall era and a fascinating precursor to the Empires and Palaces of the late 19th century.

Phase 1 of Wilton's restoration for the auditorium will be carried out by separate funding already secured. Phase 2 and 3 of the project, which will be made possible with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant if Wilton's Music Hall is successful with its second-round bid – will undertake major and urgent internal and external repairs and conservation to the terraced houses.

Wesley Kerr, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund for London, said: "Saving Wilton's Music Hall is vital not only for our understanding of music halls and their place in modern popular entertainment, but for our understanding of the story of London itself. We are delighted to give initial support to this scheme, which, along with our support to restore Hoxton Hall last year, will see two remarkable historic buildings precious to our musical heritage, on the road to being saved for future generations."

A cornerstone of London's social history with an array of remarkable stories to tell, Wilton's Music Hall once nurtured early and now infamous stars such as Champagne Charlie, played a key role in the 1889 Dockers Strike (resulting in the formation of the UKs first trade union) and was home to thousands looking for a safe place to rest their head during the two World Wars.

Today, the stunning and atmospheric building, exuding what is described by the National Trust as "picturesque decrepitude", is led today by Artistic Director Frances Mayhew and produces an exciting programme of imaginative, diverse and distinct entertainment including theatre, music, comedy, cinema and cabaret. She explains how important HLF's support is to the future of the building, but how there is also much work to do to ensure its future:

"We are thrilled to have this initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and it really feels we can move forward with our phased Capital Project. The total project cost for Phases 2 and 3 is £2.2million and the race is now on to secure the remaining £600,000 to enable us to submit our next round application hopefully as early as spring 2013. This means we have months to raise the outstanding balance. The Garfield Weston Foundation has already stepped forward with a

grant of £150,000 and a private benefactor has donated £50,000 towards this target and we hope other supporters will do the same to help us secure this really remarkable building."

David Suchet, Patron of Wilton's Capital Project, added: "I am so thrilled that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded Wilton's this initial funding for Phases 2 and 3 of their Capital Project. I can't think of any cause more deserving. We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of many individuals and trusts and foundations, so thank you, and we just hope everyone steps forward and helps us raise this final amount to save the last surviving Grand Music Hall in the world, such a unique and beautiful venue."

Jim Fitzpatrick, MP for Poplar and Limehouse, who has been closely following Wilton's campaign to be saved added his support for the project. He said: "I am delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given its support to Wilton's Music Hall – which is a jewel in the East End's crown. It is so important that heritage treasures like Wilton's are protected, preserved and opened up for people to enjoy, and fantastic news that the vigorous campaigning to save Wilton's has had such success. I look forward to supporting the hard work that will be needed to see Wilton's thrive again."

Visit the Wilton's Music Hall website for details of how to contribute to the fundraising effort.

Note to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we believe it 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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