Work begins on Abbotsford regeneration

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The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, Patron of The Abbotsford Trust, cut the first sod on the site of the new building which is part of a project to transform Abbotsford into a world-class visitor attraction that will protect Scott's legacy for future generations and bring additional economic benefit to the surrounding Borders region.

The Duke was watched by representatives from some of the organisations and individuals who have made the project possible, as well as some of Sir Walter Scott's descendants.

Over £10million has been raised to date as part of the Trust's campaign to save Abbotsford. Major funders include the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), The Scottish Government and Historic Scotland, Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Enterprise, as well as a number of private individuals and charitable trusts.

Border Construction has been appointed to build the new visitor centre, managing the project from its Earlston office. The building, which will contain a visitor interpretation area showcasing Scott's importance on the world stage, a shop and restaurant, is set to open in Spring 2012. The main house at Abbotsford will close at the end of this year's summer visitor season on 16 September to allow extensive repairs to the fabric of the building, the development of a new visitor accommodation wing, new education facilities and improved visitor access. It will reopen in 2013.

Fundraising for the project remains ongoing, with an additional £4million required to create an endowment that will guarantee Abbotsford's future.

In addition to the sod-cutting event, the Duke of Buccleuch also helped children from Tweedbank Primary School replant a sapling from the construction site to a new position in Abbotsford's grounds.

His Grace, The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, said: "When The Abbotsford Trust took over this historic house in 2007, it was in need of substantial restoration and repair and declining visitor numbers meant that there were insufficient funds to repair and maintain it for the future. Thanks to the work of the Trust and the support and generosity of numerous organisations, individuals and, not least, the Scottish Borders public, I am delighted that today we are able to start the work that will create a visitor experience worthy of one of the most influential Scots who ever lived.

"Scott's work brought Scotland to the attention of the world and through this regeneration, we aim to create a legacy that will be enjoyed for years to come by visitors from across the globe and that will also bring lasting economic benefit to the Borders region."

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "Works start at Abbotsford in a year that sees four major HLF-funded museum projects come to fruition – the Burns Museum, Riverside, the National Museum of Scotland and Scottish Portrait Gallery. Once its transformation is complete, Abbotsford will join Scotland's portfolio of world-class attractions showcasing its fascinating collections in a modern and dynamic way. The legacy of Sir Walter Scott will soon be a source of education and delight for visitors from home and abroad while making a significant contribution to Scotland's culture, society and economy."

Councillor David Parker, Leader of Scottish Borders Council, said: "It is a tremendous day for Abbotsford and the Borders. We are all thrilled that the trustees are now able to commence works to deliver their vision for Abbotsford. Over

the next three years it will be transformed into a world-class tourist and heritage destination, and will become an even greater Borders asset than it is at present. There is no doubt that Scott's legacy will be taken to new levels by the investment in this project."

For more information on Abbotsford, visit www.scottsabbotsford.co.uk.

For further information on Abbotsford please contact Karen Finlay or Yvonne Bruce at Artisan PR on 01578 722 690.

Note to editors

The Abbotsford Trust was formed in 2007 following the death of Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott, the last descendant of Sir Walter Scott to live in the house. The Trust's Patron is the Duke of Buccleuch and it also has two of Scott's descendants among its members. The Abbotsford Trust aims to preserve, protect and improve Abbotsford and its surrounds for the benefit and enjoyment of the public and also aims to enhance knowledge and understanding about the life and works of Sir Walter Scott.