Conservation project will save church's medieval



Wall paintings in St Marys Chalgrove will be saved

The Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Chalgrove, in South Oxfordshire, has received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a project which aims to enhance the Grade I-listed 12th century building and its contents, in keeping with what has been inherited from the past.

Development funding of £30,000 has been awarded to help Chalgrove Church progress its plans to apply for a full grant of £369,000 at a later date.

The project aims to conserve the 14th-century wall paintings, and explore other walls in the church for further hidden wall paintings using the latest 'radar' imaging techniques. New heating and lighting systems, sympathetic to the mediaeval artwork, are planned and are being developed. Further works to be undertaken will remove damaging paint from stonework, and through re-plastering and re-decoration, the church, with its precious heritage, will be given a precious future.

The church's chancel contains 'one of the most complete series of wallpaintings in the country' (Nicholas Pevsner: *The Buildings of England* published 1947) and the 44 images there present 'one of the best impressions of a fully painted parish church interior of the period' (Royal Academy of Arts, 1987).

Educational plans will be developed to assist national and international visitors of all ages in their understanding of the heritage items of interest in the church such as tombs and mediaeval brasses and as well as the stories depicted in the wall paintings.

With the assistance of the Chalgrove Local History Group, a fuller picture of its place in the history of the village and the country will be presented through new literature, learning opportunities, and digital depiction on their website.

The church also will be re-equipped for today's village life with better access for disabled users and a sound enhancement system, which will be valued by school children and event organizers as well as those using the church for weddings and funerals.

The village has always enthusiastically supported the conservation of their church, raising funds for the preservation of the bells, a rare turret clock, a Friendly Society Banner from years past, and the church building itself.

The Vicar, the Rev Canon Ian Cohen, said: "We are very encouraged that the HLF trustees are keen to see us complete our important works and are currently minded to give us 50-60% of the cost. With their support, and with their help mentoring this stage of the project, we should be able to develop our plans in a way that ends in success for everyone. The glory of Chalgrove Church is that it is a country church, which has always sought to serve this village and neighbourhood. In the future, with the enthusiasm generated by HLF support, its heritage can be shared so much more widely."

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: "Chalgrove Church houses a rare near-complete set of wall paintings which offer a unique insight into Christian beliefs in the 14th century, with even more paintings potentially waiting to be uncovered. We're pleased to support the church and the local community as they develop their plans to secure the future of their much-loved building and its assets and open them up for even more people to enjoy."

Notes to editors

First-round pass
Heritage Lottery Fund grant applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

About Chalgrove Church
The church is a parish church in the Diocese of Oxford in the Church of England. The parochial church council is the Trustee Body charged with caring for the church. It is an exempt charity. Its work and activity is supported by local donations, local grants, and fundraising appeals.

For more information about the church and the conservation project, visit the St Mary's Church website.

Further information

For more information, images and interviews, please contact the Vicar, The Rev Canon Ian Cohen on 01865 890 392 or project leader Charles Baker Esq on 01865 400 402.