Gorton Monastery receives £1.7m from Heritage



Artist's impression of the Welcome Wing of Gorton Monastery

The Monastery of St Francis & Gorton Trust has been awarded a £1.7million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, as part of a wider £3m project, to enable the charitable trust to complete the restoration and conservation of the Pugin designed Victorian gothic masterpiece. The funding will also allow the trust to build a new 'Welcome Wing' creating a new entrance.

This follows a £1m pledge of financial support in September by The Stoller Charitable Trust whose chairman is Norman Stoller CBE, a private benefactor, philanthropist and former Oldham businessman. The Stoller Charitable Trust's donation was conditional and to be used as matched funding if a submission for the grant from the HLF was successful.

The £3m total funding will allow for the construction of a permanent and sustainable carbon neutral front wing, designed to welcome the general public and enable the monastery to share its story and be 'open every day for everyone'. This will result in the creation of new community and educational space, enhanced visitor facilities, making the Monastery a permanent resource that schools, the community and the general public can experience and enjoy all of the time.

The funding will also allow the trust to carry out urgent conservation work and repair of the Grade II* listed building. Including initial support of more than £200,000 awarded in March 2013, this grant brings HLF's total investment to almost £2m.

Elaine Griffiths, Chief Executive of The Monastery of St Francis & Gorton Trust, explains: “This is a fantastic Christmas present for Gorton and for Manchester as a whole. The collapse of the friary during the original fundraising period meant that almost £1m had to be diverted into saving that part of the Grade II* listed buildings, and so vital restoration and conservation work inside the former church has had to be deferred until now. Also, once constructed, the Welcome Wing will allow us to open our doors to the community for the first time in more than 25 years which is fantastic.”

Paul Griffiths, Chairman of the Monastery of St Francis & Gorton Trust, added: “This very important and necessary HLF grant sits alongside other important donations and is wonderful news. It will allow us to complete the task first started in 1996. The monastery is already established as an award winning events venue that generates local employment, creates added value and has helped the regeneration of the local area. Once this final phase of work has been completed these beautiful heritage buildings can be open every day for local schools, charities, community groups and organisations to use and enjoy so that the monastery will be at the heart of its local community once more.”

Sara Hilton, Head of HLF North West, said: “Gorton Monastery is already a hugely significant landmark for the people of Manchester and is a well-used community space. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, today’s £1.7m grant, which brings HLF’s total investment in the monastery to just under £2m - will significantly add to Gorton’s already impressive offer by helping create the new Welcome Wing and allow the continuation of urgent conservation works. This project demonstrates how a heritage building, while providing an important link to a community’s roots, can also be adapted for the needs of today.”

The Welcome Wing has full planning and listed building consent. The appointed architects are award-winning ecological architecture practice, Ecoarc, based in Kendal, Cumbria. It is anticipated the work will be complete by the end of 2016.

Notes to editors

Gorton Monastery

Edward Pugin, one of the leading architects of the day and whose father Augustus was the architect for the Houses of Parliament, was commissioned to design and build the imposing church and friary on Gorton Lane by the Franciscans in 1863.

The Franciscans left the site in 1989 and after a failed attempt by a developer to convert the buildings into apartments the buildings were finally handed over to the care of the Monastery of St Francis and Gorton Trust in 1996 after seven years of neglect. The Grade II* monastery's £6.5m restoration was funded by major grants from HLF, European Regional Development Fund, English Heritage, and private donations. Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) and the Architectural Heritage Fund. For more information about The Monastery and how to donate, visit the Gorton Monastery Trust's website or call 0161 223 3211.

The monastery is now widely regarded as Manchester’s most unique and inspiring events venue. Its flexible space accommodates up to 600 people and is ideal for events from product launches and corporate celebrations to weddings and large social occasions. For smaller, more intimate occasions, the Private Chapel can hold up to 50 people and is perfect for private dining or small business events.

It has won a Gold Award as Best Unusual Venue UK, in the prestigious national Meetings and Incentive Travel Awards for an unprecedented three years in a row, and has been a finalist in other categories including Best Conference and Banqueting Staff and Best Value for Money Venue in the past two years, making it the most successful North West venue since its first nomination in 2012. In November 2014 at the Wedding Industry Awards, the monastery was voted

the ‘Best Wedding Venue’ in any town or city in the North West of England.

Further information

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