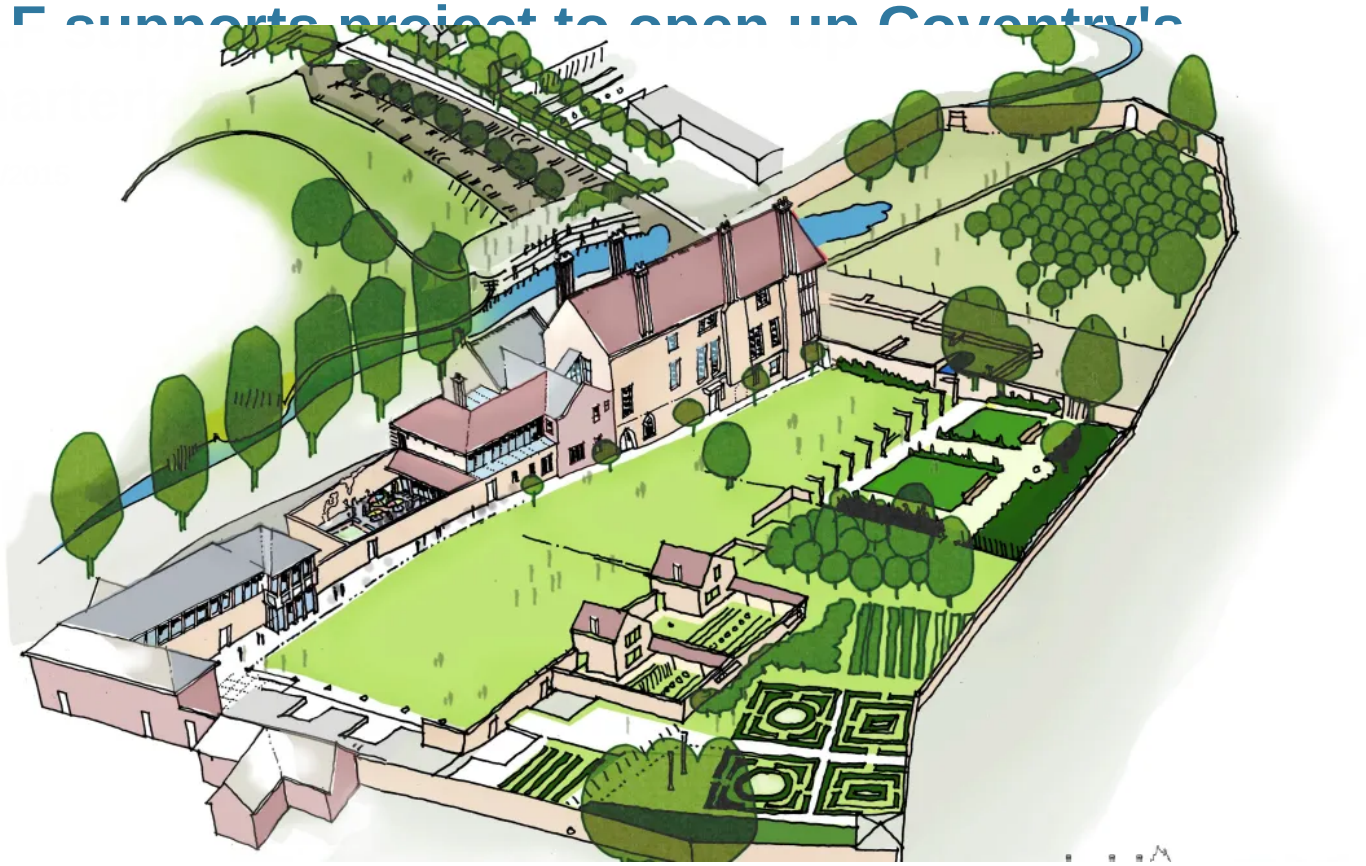
HLF supports project to open up Coventry's Charterhouse



An artist's impression of how the Coventry Charterhouse site will look like when the project is complete

An initial £400,000 has been awarded to the Charterhouse Coventry Preservation Trust to work up the detailed plans to pave the way for a total of £4.7million for Phase 1 of the Heritage Park, subject to further HLF approval.

The funding will allow the trust, working closely with the local community, to produce detailed proposals to enable applications for funding to match the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The 14th-century property is of huge historic significance with mediaeval and Elizabethan artwork that has few parallels anywhere in the UK.

The Charterhouse was originally constructed as a large Carthusian monastery complex, with Richard II and Queen Anne of Bohemia laying the foundation stone to the church in 1386. Parts of the church wall remain to this day embedded in 600 metres of monastic precinct walls which originally protected the silent monks from the noise and sins of the city.

Ian Harrabin, chairman of the trust which took ownership of the building from City College after a community campaign to keep the building for the people of the city, said it was a very significant moment for Coventry and could now set the wheels in motion for delivery of the whole Heritage Park.

He said: “This is massive news for the city and a major first step towards raising the funding for the whole Heritage Park. Having so much history from over 600 years in one place is unique – it’s like a timeline of the city’s history from centuries before Shakespeare to the inventors of the bicycle. What’s amazing is that up until recently most people didn’t know it existed.

“The city’s rich history has the potential to have a huge effect on the economic well-being of Coventry and the attraction of jobs. It’s a great kick-start for any bid to become city of culture in the next few years.

“We are very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for providing the initial tranche of funding to be able to work up the more detailed plans that will allow us to move the whole project forward.

“There are so many people involved, with the trust acting as the delivery body for the local community and very active friends group, working in close partnership with the City Council and Blue Coat School as well as many other agencies. This really shows that by working together we can bring big dreams to reality.

“And this is about much more than one building, although it is of huge historic significance in itself. This is about opening up an area of the city that has been largely overlooked but, once restored, will be of national and international interest.”

The Heritage Park will connect the Charterhouse with both the Arboretum Cemetery – designed by Joseph Paxton, the creator of the Crystal Palace – and along the riverside parkland to one of the world’s earliest railway viaducts which was designed by Robert Stephenson.

Woodland trails and river walks are planned to connect to both ends of Far Gosford St, past Fargo Village Creative Quarter and Gosford Green – which was where the War of the Roses began.

The funding that has been secured is to work up the proposals to restore the buildings, monastic walls and exceptional art as well as the creation of conference facilities and a café.

Within the inner walls will be a tranquil garden and two recreated monks cells, one to show how the monks lived and one as an acoustic ‘room of silence’ to experience what it was like to live like the silent Carthusian monks in a place without noise.

Harrabin added: “It is already a spiritual place and we want people to enjoy the peace of Charterhouse, whether they have a faith or not.”

Other plans include a community orchard, an urban farm, the naturalising of the river to create an ‘urban beach’ and the recreation of the monks’ fishing ponds. The parkland will be expanded to include new wildflower meadows and wetland areas to encourage wildlife.

Reyahn King, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: “This rare example of a surviving Carthusian monastery has the potential to become a key destination within Coventry. Heritage Lottery Fund’s initial investment will help develop plans to turn this currently inaccessible site into both a space to learn about the city’s little-known religious history and - with features such as a café, park, urban farm and traditional orchard - a truly enjoyable place to spend time.”

The Charterhouse was gifted to the people of Coventry by Colonel William F. Ryley, the founder of the Chamber of Commerce in Coventry, on his death in 1940 with a vision of it becoming a centre for the city’s arts and culture.

Louise Bennett, Chief Executive of the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce and a Charterhouse Coventry Preservation trustee, said it was fitting that his vision would start to be fulfilled 75 years later.

She said: “Huge congratulations must go to the community who have fought tirelessly for at least the past 25 years to open the Charterhouse to the public. This is a great day for Coventry from a cultural and economic point of view.”

Ann Lucas, Leader of Coventry City Council, said: “This is great news for the city and is a major step towards delivering the ambitious vision of the Heritage Park. Coventry has a rich history over 1,000 years that is often overlooked. This project will bring our history to life and open up a large area of parkland and the city’s river on the edge of the city centre.”

Rt Rev Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry, said: “Charterhouse is one of Coventry's gems that for years lay hidden and almost forgotten. Through the determination of its new preservation trust, the imagination of many others and, now, generous support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this priceless prize of historical, cultural and religious significance is beginning to shine once more. It's a remarkable achievement that will bring great benefit to Coventry and to everyone who comes to see it.”

Notes to editors

The Charterhouse Coventry Preservation Trust was established in 2011 after Coventry City College vacated the Charterhouse and saw no possibility other than to sell the property on the open market, due to its unsuitability for modern teaching.

The local community starting a campaign to keep the building for the public and the trust was formed to take ownership of the building and to implement the vision for its future.