Shakespeare Birthplace Trust secures Lottery grant



Model of Shakespeare's New Place Stewart Writtle

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust aims to re-imagine the internationally significant site, creating a place where visitors can discover the story of Shakespeare at the height of his success as a writer and prominent citizen of his home town. The project will also be a catalyst for involving the communities of Stratford and the wider Midlands region with the world-famous heritage on their doorstep through new volunteering and education programmes.

Work is due to start in March 2015, and Shakespeare’s New Place is scheduled to open for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death on 23 April 2016. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust will now also seek matching funds to support the £5.25million project.

The re-imagined Shakespeare’s New Place project:

- Visitors will be invited to walk in Shakespeare’s footsteps through a new entrance on the footprint of his original gatehouse
- Contemporary landscape treatment will echo the original house, giving visitors an impression of its scale and its relationship to the surrounding buildings, such as the neighbouring school and Guild Chapel once attended by Shakespeare

- A deep, illuminated pool is planned to mark the heart of the site where the family's living quarters once stood, surrounded by paths engraved with Shakespeare's plays
- Commissioned artworks and displays throughout the site will evoke a sense of family life and Shakespeare's major works written during the 19 years he owned New Place.

The project will also see further works to the neighbouring Nash's House, sunken Knot Garden, and Great Garden.

Nash's House will be conserved and extended to provide an exhibition centre where rare and important artefacts relating to New Place can be displayed, many of them for the first time. There will be space for informal learning and family activities, and modern, fully accessible, facilities for visitors, staff and volunteers. The home of Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth and her husband Thomas Nash has been the entrance to New Place for many years. The Grade I listed building, a fine example of Elizabethan architecture, requires essential conservation work, including structural repairs, to remain open to the public.

The sunken Knot Garden will be restored in keeping with the intention of the original design by Ernest Law, the renowned garden designer who was considered one of the finest exponents of the Jacobean knot garden revivals of the early twentieth century.

Elements of the Great Garden, the largest surviving part of Shakespeare's estate, will be conserved and restored following the opening of New Place in 2016. A garden apprenticeship scheme will be developed as part of the transformation project, and apprentices will support the ongoing development of the Grade II registered garden to a conservation management plan. Local residents have enjoyed free entry to the Great Garden for many years, and this will continue when New Place reopens.

Described in Shakespeare's will as "The house wherein I dwell", New Place has attracted literary pilgrims for centuries. However, Shakespeare's family home was demolished in the 18th century, and a second house, built in its place, was also demolished in 1759 by its owner Francis Gastrell, who was reputedly annoyed by visiting Shakespeare enthusiasts, as well as a tax dispute with the local parish. With much of its heritage hidden below ground or in the extensive archives of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, it has been difficult for many visitors to get a real sense of the site's significance and history. The HLF award will enable the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust to reinterpret the property based on fresh insights provided by the archaeological Dig for Shakespeare (2010-12).

Diana Owen, Chief Executive Officer of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust said: "We are delighted to be awarded this funding by the HLF to help us realise our plan to make New Place the jewel in the crown of our national literary and cultural heritage as the adult home of our most famous playwright. Our ambition, quite simply, is to create a place where visitors' imaginations can soar as Shakespeare's did. This is the biggest single Shakespearian project to commemorate 400 years of Shakespeare's legacy in 2016 and we look forward to welcoming visitors next year and for centuries to come."

She added, "I would also like to thank the community in Stratford, and everyone who has lent their support and involvement in developing our plans to put Shakespeare's New Place at the epicentre of the story of Shakespeare the writer and citizen of Stratford. We look forward to working with all our supporters to develop volunteering and educational programmes and other opportunities to release the full potential of New Place."

Nadhim Zahawi, MP for Stratford and a strong supporter of the project, said, "New Place is a part of the Shakespeare story we hear less often. It's the story of a Warwickshire grammar school boy made good, having made his name and fortune in the big city turning back to the small town he loved. That's all the more reason to tell it.

"Having followed this project since its early days and having supported the Trust's grant application, it's fantastic to see the Heritage Lottery Fund award £1.8m. This is great news for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and for Stratford as a whole. The 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's legacy in 2016 is an important year, and projects like this will ensure that Stratford and its tourism offering remain at its heart."

Reyahn King, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: "With the 400th anniversary approaching next year, now is the time when Shakespeare appears more vividly in our hearts and imaginations than ever before. This exciting project at New Place, which 're-imagines' his life and last home, will ensure we keep on telling Shakespeare's stories to visitors and future generations."

Notes to editors

About the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is the independent charity that cares for the world's greatest Shakespeare heritage sites, the five Shakespeare family homes in Stratford-upon-Avon, and promotes the enjoyment and understanding of Shakespeare's works, life and times all over the world.

The charity runs formal and informal educational programmes for people of all ages. It holds the world's largest Shakespeare-related museum and archives open free to the public, a collection which is designated as being of international importance.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust receives no regular direct government funding or public subsidy; it depends on income generated through the support of visitors, donors, grant funders, volunteers and Friends. For further information visit The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website.

Further information

Lynn Beddoe, PR & Public Affairs Manager at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, on tel: 01789 207134, or email: lynn.beddoe@shakespeare.org.uk