

Abingdon Old County Hall

15/03/2010

Plans to give Abingdon's historic County Hall Museum a complete makeover will go ahead, thanks to a final grant of just over £1.7 million announced today by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

To date, the project has been awarded £210,000 in development funding, and a £50,000 project planning grant, making the total investment £1.97million.

The imposing town centre Grade I listed building was constructed between 1678 and 1682 and is steeped in local history and traditions. Its dual role as market hall and Sessions House dates from when Abingdon was included in the boundaries of the old county of Berkshire and played host to the local courts, the assizes. A popular local museum created in the 1920s it boasts a rich collection of local historical artefacts plus geological and archaeological finds, textiles, paintings and objects relating to the former MG Motors plant in the town.

Specific improvements planned include a platform lift with stops to the basement, street-level and Arcade. Details of the design of the lift have been agreed with English Heritage and gained planning permission in autumn 2009.

The project provides improved education and community facilities and space for temporary exhibitions. A programme of community consultation, education and audience development will now get underway. Abingdon Town Council, which has been awarded the grant, hopes to increase the visitor figures, of 20,000 per year, to 30,000.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "This project will breathe new life into a much-loved historic building and help to underpin its future as a visitor attraction, venue and educational resource."

The restoration and improvement work that will now get underway includes extension and modernisation of the cellar for the new learning and community space, shop, coffee bar and toilets. The Sessions Hall will be equipped with new lighting, heating, air-conditioning and soundproofing.

Museum Curator, Dr Lauren Gilmour, said: "We are delighted that we will be opening up the second floor to the public with displays of the MG collection and Oxfordshire County Council's craft collection, enlarged and improved. In addition a new display area will be designed for the large important reserve collections."

Councillor Julie Mayhew-Archer, Chair of the County Hall Museum Management Committee, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to improve a building of national significance and the valuable Museum services it provides."

Notes to editors

The HLF grant to the project Access to Abingdon County Hall Museum is for £1,710,000 (56% of project costs) and is a Stage Two pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £428million to more than 3,000 projects across the South East England region alone.

Further information

Vicky Wilford, HLF Press Office on 020 7591 6046 / 07968 129241 or vickyw@hlf.org.uk.

Dr Lauren Gilmour, Abingdon Town Council Museum Curator on 01235 523703 or lauren.gilmour@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If Dr Gilmour is unavailable please contact Mr Nigel Warner, Town Clerk on 01235 522642 or nigel.warner@abingdon.gov.uk