£1.26m grant opens up ancient palace and gardens

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The Palace was once home to Cardinal Wolsey, the controlling figure in virtually all matters of state during Henry VIII Reign. Work to repair both the surviving Great Hall building (with its wonderful vaulted State Chamber) and the adjacent ruins will now start at the end of this year. Once completed, a new open space – The Education Garden – will be available for school and community use and sensory plantings will help explain the heritage of the site. Inside and out, the spaces will become user-friendly for visitors with mobility, sight and other accessibility needs. In addition to this a new classroom will be created, along with a new Music Library, a new rehearsal space, a proper catering kitchen and appropriate toilets for young visitors. The Song School will also be refurbished and an on-site studio flat created for the annual organ scholar.

Dean of Southwell, the Very Revd John Guille, said: “We’re delighted that this ‘sleeping beauty’ of the archbishop’s palace is now being woken up due to the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund. This grant will transform the building and gardens into a multi-purpose community facility and learning centre. It’s quite a thought that the building was used not only by Cardinal Wolsey and King Charles I, but by countless other monarchs and Lords, yet now everyone will be able to come there and learn about its colourful history. This project will enhance the wonderful heritage for which Southwell is already renowned, opening up the Cathedral and the town to many more potential visitors.”

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands, Vanessa Harbar welcomed the plans: “This is a spectacular site for so many reasons; the charming and picturesque ruins, which are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the Great Hall which has played its role in history over many centuries, and the admirable work taking place for young people in education and music. Southwell Minster has worked very hard to sustain the site; we are pleased it will now be opened up for the public’s enjoyment. HLF is delighted to be able to fund this project and thoroughly looks forward to the outcomes.”

While work takes place on stabilizing the fabric of the palace ruins, learning opportunities for apprentices will be available in the craft of restoring and preserving heritage fabric. It is estimated there will be some 300 additional new volunteers in various roles over the life of the project. Once open, the whole project will create many new volunteer posts, across educational activities.

Open access is the keynote – both physical and intellectual – and the project will see many of Southwell Minster’s treasures, from papal seals to a Turner watercolour, being put on public view for the first time. The project will include many innovative elements, including tactile displays, with icons and graphics for the various historical periods guiding visitors around the building and ruins. A summer time marquee is planned for the part of the gardens and new signage, explanatory plaques and a dramatised audio soundscape will lead visitors through the rich heritage of the building and garden, telling some of the fascinating stories of Southwell’s history.

The Palace, adjacent to Southwell Minster, was first mentioned in Domesday Book and was the final home of one of history’s most colourful characters - Cardinal Wolsey; later arrested for high treason after falling from Henry VIII's grace, as he sought an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. It was where the surrender of King Charles I was organised by his Scottish captors and ultimately ransacked by the Scottish army at the end of the civil war. It also sits on part of the footprint of one of the largest Roman villas in the country. This ancient site – visited by most of the early medieval kings - is steeped with history, and until now, has not been widely open to the general public. The new

development hopes to attract more than 1.5million new visitors to the town over a ten year period.

Further information

Rachel Farmer on 01636 817 218 or rachel@southwell.anglican.org

Robert Smith, HLF press office on 0207 591 6245 or roberts@hlf.org.uk