Birkenhead Priory given a new lease of life

10/10/2013

The project has been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant of £393,100, it was announced today.

Led by Wirral Council the project will:

- conserve the north and west range Priory buildings and complete other restoration works in order to remove the Priory from the Heritage At Risk register;
- improve the visitor experience through a range of interactive activities including the latest smartphone technology;
- create a digital learning pack for schools and a public performance programme based on the Priory's heritage;
- provide opportunities for volunteers to get involved;
- revamp the museum in the Priory's undercroft.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "Birkenhead Priory is such a beautiful building and stands as an impressive reminder of the town's historic beginnings, providing a place of tranquillity amongst the hustle and bustle of 21st-century life. Today's grant will not only mean the building will no longer be 'at risk' but will also place it firmly back at the heart of the community.

"Local people will be able to, for the first time in many years, truly understand the Priory's local and international significance and benefit from a variety of exciting events and activities. We at HLF are confident that, once completed, Birkenhead Priory will once again be a thriving place that local people will be proud of."

Cllr Chris Meaden, Wirral Council Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing, said: "This is really fantastic news. Birkenhead Priory is one of the most iconic and important buildings in the borough. Following on from the renovation work that has already been carried out, this Heritage Lottery funding will enable us to continue efforts to return the Priory to the forefront of people's consciousness, bring more visitors to the site and improve their experience and understanding while they are there."

Frank Field MP for Birkenhead, said: "It is appropriate that the oldest building in Merseyside should be supported by the HLF and the grant will help to rebalance the cultural pull of both sides of the river."

Birkenhead Priory dates back to 1150 when it was founded as a small monastery for Benedictine Monks and is one of only four surviving Benedictine sites in the North West; it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and includes a range of Grade I listed structures. The site includes St Mary's Tower which is what remains of the first parish church of Birkenhead. Opened in 1822 and closed in the 1970s due to population changes and dilapidation, the tower is Grade II listed and gives unrivalled views of Birkenhead and over the River Mersey to Liverpool.

Wirral Council has recently invested £750,000 to improve site accessibility and to make the stonework of St Mary's Tower safe.

Notes to editors

- HLF have invested a total of £11.6m into heritage projects across Birkenhead.

- Previously funded HLF projects include Birkenhead Park which was awarded a grant of over £7m.

Further information

Laura Bates, Communications Manager at the Heritage Lottery Fund on 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk.

Jo McGuire, Development Manager Wirral Council on 0151 652 4177, email: jomcguire@wirral.gov.uk.