Improvements at Cally Park

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The development grant means that the council can now progress plans to save and conserve the Grade II* listed clock tower, a hidden gem of the city's industrial heritage, which has stood empty for 75 years.

Opened in 1855 as the centrepiece of the former Metropolitan Cattle Market, the seven storey clock tower offers magnificent views over London. The tower and the market’s impressive Grade II listed railings - built to withstand a bull stampede - are on English Heritage’s register of Heritage at Risk.

Set in the middle of the 7.4 hectare (18.27 acre) Caledonian Park (the borough's second largest green space) - the clock tower and a new visitor centre are expected to be a big draw for residents and visitors alike - telling the fascinating history of the tower, the surrounding area and the communities that have lived, worked and played there.

Everyone from local school children to businesses and volunteers are invited to be involved in bringing the historic tower and its surroundings back to life.

Cllr Rakhia Ismail, executive member for sustainability said: "Residents, enthusiasts and fellow councillors have shared a wish to do this for a very long time - so, I'm absolutely delighted the Cally Clock Tower will take its rightful place in London's rediscovered history and heritage.

"Local communities will be heavily involved in the process of bringing the clock tower and park back to life, putting it back on the cultural map of Islington."

Caledonian Park has a rich history. Called Copenhagen Fields in the 17th century, it was a popular venue for sporting and leisure pursuits, and also a place of political dissent and demonstration. Around 100,000 people gathered in the spot to march on Parliament in 1834 in support of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

Following complaints from Clerkenwell residents and businesses about blood and dirt on the roads, Smithfield livestock market transferred to Copenhagen Fields in 1855 in search of a larger site to cope with freight-borne animals arriving at nearby Kings Cross and the Metropolitan Cattle Market was born.

The small Friday flea-market sharing the site became known as "the Cally", growing to become one of the largest in Europe.

However, following the Second World War, the livestock market closed, and the flea-market moved to Bermondsey. An abattoir stood on the site until the 1950s, this was demolished and the area transformed into social housing (The Market Estate) and a park (Caledonian Park) in the 1960s.

It is expected the council will subsequently apply for a full HLF grant to carry out the major works on it and the surrounding park, creating the Tolpuddle Visitors' Centre as part of the project.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "This structure has witnessed many developments in the life of the borough. We look forward to receiving the detailed plans for its conservation and future use."

Southern Housing Group recently completed the 10 year redevelopment project of the Market Estate to create 421 new homes at Parkside Place and investing over £1m in Cally Park including a £33k as a legacy 'gift' towards the clock tower and new park facilities.

Stephen Ross, Reinvestment Director of Southern Housing Group said: "The clock tower is one of the capital's hidden historical delights. The grant creates the potential to provide additional benefits both for the local community and provide a new attraction for visitors to this corner of the capital."

Sylvia Tunstall, Chair Caledonian Park Friends Group said: "The historic clock tower provides the splendid centre piece to our park. With the grant, there is the opportunity to realise our long cherished hopes for enhancements to the clock tower and to the park's facilities to create a truly special place to visit."

Notes to editors

A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Further information

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