£1.5million to Co-operative Museum

20/07/2010

Thanks to this award, the museum will be transformed and updated, creating new visitor facilities and learning spaces. New displays will be designed incorporating images and objects from the National Co-operative Archive whilst new specialist staff will be recruited to work with schools, colleges and the local community using the archive and museum collections.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: “The development of the co-operative movement is an important part of our social history - both for our local communities and for people across the world. By safeguarding the co operative collection and redeveloping the Rochdale Pioneers building this project will mean that more people will have the opportunity to learn about and be inspired by the story of the co-operative movement.”

Newly elected local MP Simon Danczuk has given his full support to the announcement, saying: “If there’s one museum that every pupil in England should visit it’s the Pioneers Museum in Rochdale. Everyone should know how the Co-operative movement was founded, and I’m delighted to hear that the Heritage Lottery Fund has committed substantial funding to modernising these facilities.

“At a time when the Government is talking about the need to expand co-operatives, it’s pleasing to note that Downing Street is drawing inspiration from ideas that were formed in Rochdale over 165 years ago.”

Len Wardle, Chair of The Co-operative Group, which has donated £3 million to the Co operative Heritage Trust, said: “We are extremely proud of our heritage and it is very important that people can visit the actual place where the worldwide Co-operative movement actually began.

“This award will ensure the original shop is preserved, the visitor experience is enhanced and conservation professionals can work with the valuable archive which has been assembled over many years.”

Co-operative Heritage Trust

In 1844 the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers began trading as a co-operative at 31 Toad Lane, based on a set of principles that would guide co-operative societies across the world to this day. The Pioneers' original store on Toad Lane was rented by them and they moved away in 1867 but it was later purchased by the movement, and opened as a museum in 1931, telling the story of how the co-operative movement developed through self-help to increase productive employment and overcome poverty.

The redevelopment aims to give more people access to the museum and collections. The museum building will be remodelled restoring part of the third floor to provide a dedicated education space and building an extension to hold a new staircase and lift to give full access to all parts of the Museum. At the same time, an interactive museum website will be developed that will open up access to items not physically on display.

By making the museum and archive collection accessible to a wider range of people, this project will bring a better understanding of the important history of the co-operative movement to local, national and international audiences.

Stephen Yeo, Chair of the Co-operative Heritage Trust, said: “The Museum and Archive and their distinct collections tell the story of how ordinary working people unlocked the power of working together for mutual benefit and developed a model of co-operative business that United Nations have stated has ‘improved the lives of over half of humanity’. For the last ten years we have worked tirelessly to safeguard and protect the priceless heritage of the movement, and have achieved the highest archival and museum standards.”

Stephen, continued: “The Heritage Lottery Fund funding, together with awards from a range of other contributors, will enable us to transform these collections into accessible lifelong learning resources with outreach work that will help inspire future generations of co-operators. We look forward to reopening the Rochdale Pioneers Museum on the 167th Anniversary of the day the Pioneers first took down the shutters and started serving the community in Rochdale, little knowing the impact their co-operative venture would make and the esteem they would be held forever”.

Dame Pauline Green, President of the International Co-operative Alliance and one of the Co-operative Heritage Trust Trustees, added: “The Rochdale Pioneers and the Toad Lane premises are cherished by co-operators all over the world. The new project, made possible with the support of the Co-operative Heritage Fund and the Co-operative Group, will ensure that we will have it ready to be one of the launch pads for 2012 as United Nations International Year of Co-operatives.”

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

The Co-operative Heritage Trust was established in 2007 by Co-operatives UK, the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College to safeguard the heritage assets of the co-operative movement. These include the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and the National Co-operative Archive.

The work of the Co-operative Heritage Trust is managed by the Co-operative College

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Further information

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