Plan to create new home for County and Wakefield archives secures Heritage Lottery Fund support

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The aim is to provide a secure and stable environment for the collections of the former county of the West Riding, as well as for those relating to Wakefield district. It will also improve access to the records, allowing them to be explored in a much more welcoming environment than the Service can currently offer.

The bid included development funding of over £200,000, and this has been awarded to help the Archive Service progress its plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

The Archive Service's Wakefield collections are currently held in the old Registry of Deeds building, which is no longer fit for purpose.

Wakefield Council has allocated a site in Kirkgate for a replacement building, where the Service will have the space to reconnect communities with their archives, including the large collections of mining records relating to the former coalfield communities.

The Service will also have the facilities to offer better training and guidance for those wishing to explore archives relating to family and local history, and to offer a wider range of volunteering opportunities, especially in its highly regarded conservation unit.

The archive collections held in Wakefield range in date from the 12th century to the present day, but most of them record the development of the West Riding as one of England's main industrial and manufacturing centres in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. They include the seven million entries in the deeds registers which record property transactions from 1704 to 1972 – a unique source of information for the history of houses, families and neighbourhoods.

Councillor Peter Box CBE, Leader of Wakefield Council, said: "This is very good news and a big step forward in keeping the archives in Wakefield, the seat of the old West Riding. The records are part of our heritage and history and I hope we can now move on to developing a bid which will secure funding for this nationally-important collection of information."

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Fiona Spiers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "This archive is truly extraordinary, a rich source of the minutiae of daily life in the West Riding which gives us a fascinating insight into the triumphs and the tragedies of 19th-century existence. We believe this project has great potential and by giving it our initial support we hope that it will progress on to securing a full Heritage Lottery Fund grant at a later date."

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. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

Further information

Please contact Wakefield Council Communications team on 01924 305 295, email: pressoffice@wakefield.gov.uk.