Dukesfield lead mill project gets green light

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The announcement comes after 18 months of collaborative planning work on the Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers project led by the Friends of the North Pennines charity and the communities of Hexhamshire and Slaley parishes.

"This is fantastic news" said Ian Forbes, Chair of the Friends of the North Pennines. "It means we can carry out our two-year plan to celebrate an industry that was vital to the development of the North East. It linked the High Pennine Dales to Tyneside, and the successful partnership we have formed with the team in Hexhamshire and Slaley reflects our desire to reconnect communities along the old lead routes, and help them celebrate their heritage."

Team member and Hexhamshire parish councillor, Greg Finch, added: "This grant award is a great tribute to the huge amount of work put in by many people. More importantly it now means we can conserve the physical remains of the Dukesfield mill arches, and involve people in learning new skills in a range of conservation, research and heritage activities. There are already nearly 100 people on our mailing list, living at all points from the North Pennines down to Blaydon, and we know many are keen to join us in finding out about those who worked at Dukesfield and along the routes which carried the ore and lead. It will all help stimulate the exploration and understanding of our area and its industrial past."

Dukesfield’s smelting mill was central to the development of the lead business of the Blackett and Beaumont families in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the project has the support of their descendants, Lord Allendale’s family. "Dukesfield played an important part in our family story" said the present Lord Allendale: "so naturally we’re delighted to help this tremendous project put together by the local community, which clearly also has a great affection for the lead industry’s heritage." Allendale Estates, who still own the land, are preparing to grant a long lease of the mill site to the project.

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, commented on the funding: "We are delighted to see the project reach this point. The significance of the lead industry to Tyneside is often overlooked despite being such an integral part of its economic and social history, with Dukesfield mill considered to have been the largest in Europe at one point. This project will preserve this great legacy while providing numerous benefits for the volunteers involved and the wider community."

The project was awarded a development grant by the HLF in June 2012 to produce full plans, the technical work on which was led by the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Staff Unit based in Stanhope. Preparations are now under way for the delivery phase of the project, which is expected to start later this spring. "There will be a wide range of opportunities for people to get involved" added Ian Forbes. "This is a project for communities along the whole length of the lead route."

Notes to editors

The Friends of the North Pennines charity promotes the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical, natural and built environment in and around the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It has a particular interest in promoting the exploration and understanding of the North Pennines area, and achieves this by carrying out various projects, promoting and undertaking research, providing advice and training, publishing information and co-operating with other organisations.

Further information

Greg Finch, 01434 607 490, email: gregpfinch@hotmail.com.

HLF: Laura Bates on 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk.