

Lord Lieutenant of Essex opening Finchingfield Guidhall

Finchingfield Guildhall is to be completely restored, creating a new space for use by the local community, thanks to an award of £980,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

A major programme of repairs, refurbishment and refurbishment will now be undertaken at the Guildhall, including works to improve access for visitors. At the same time, the museum collection will be catalogued, re-displayed and extended with recordings of local people's memories of the village and surrounding area.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "For over 550 years Finchingfield Guildhall has played a central role in village life. With support from HLF, the Finchingfield Almshouse Trust will be able to restore the historic guildhall and return it to use by the community. This is a wonderful example of how the preservation and care for our heritage can directly benefit local people."

Finchingfield Almhouse Trustee, Jacelyn Bargman, said: "This Grade I building has immense historical significance, a significance not limited to the physical structure itself but one that encompasses the social roles it has played over time. The preservation and study of this building and what it stood for not only remembers a past, different way of living but also offers a wonderful opportunity to provide the modern village community with a vibrant, social focal point."

Brooks Newmark MP, said: "Finchingfield Guildhall is a fantastic local resource and I am pleased that the Finchingfield Almshouse Trust, supported by the HLF, will be able to restore the guildhall for community use. Preserving this building

will allow future generations to understand and enjoy the historical significance of past village life.”

Finchingfield Guildhall was first built in 1470 by the Guild of the Holy Trinity. The original building was purchased by the village in the 17th century, and used in part as a school. Almshouses were added for the first time, and the Guildhall continued to be used by the village for a variety of functions, including civic administration and poor relief. By 1954 a museum and library had been created on the ground floor and the 'School Room' became the 'Parish Room'.

Unfortunately, much of the repair work in the 1950s was carried out using modern materials, which we now know harm the Guildhall’s ancient timber frame. This project aims to strip out the harmful materials and to restore the original guildhall on the upper floor.

The long history of using the building for educational purposes will continue with provision of a greatly improved library and museum facility, ensuring that the Guildhall can continue to be used by local people for generations to come.

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, including £290million to nearly 3,000 projects across the East of England.

Finchingfield Almshouse Trust is a registered charity (no. 205016) responsible for maintaining and managing the Guildhall property. The Trust has its roots in charitable foundations dating from the 1500s and the Guildhall has always been an essential part of meeting charitable obligations. The current project is being carried out with the consent of the Charity Commission and the Trust will continue with its name as a demonstrable link with the past. The Trust has formed a Project Team to drive the restoration and full details of the plans and progress are to be found on the website www.finchingfieldguildhall.org.uk

Further information

Roland Smith, HLF Communications on 020 7591 6047 / 07713 48 64 20 or rolands@hlf.org.uk

Jeremy Toynbee, Finchingfield Guildhall Restoration Project Team on 01371 811 608 / 07791 653 484 or on participation@finchingfieldguildhall.org.uk