Green light for St Albans Museums project

29/11/2013

The announcement of first phase development funding of £282,000 is a tremendous start for the City project. This first-round pass means St Albans City and District Council can lead development of detailed plans for an inspirational home for the Museum of St Albans (MOSTA). MOSTA is currently based in Hatfield Road, St Albans.

The town hall is one of the best known buildings in St Albans. Its image has been used in paintings and photographs to represent the heart and spirit of the city.

The development funding will be used to develop the first stages of the project. This work will help to progress a second-round application for a further £2.5m towards the cost of refurbishing the town hall. The total project cost is estimated to be £6.75m. The balance is being provided by the council and fund raising by the St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust.

The project aims to deliver a must-see Hertfordshire attraction, showcasing St Albans' unique medieval heritage and space for the University of Hertfordshire's contemporary art gallery. It will replace an outdated museum and improve interpretation of the social history collection. It will also significantly enhance cultural life in the city and attract many visitors each year.

Plans have been drawn up to provide a facility for the whole city, a central hub to hold events and to welcome visitors from all over the world. Visitors will have the opportunity to discover over 2,000 years of St Albans' remarkable history and experience innovative and contemporary museum interpretation and displays. They will be able to explore the delights of the historic town hall, Court Room and Prison Cells and enjoy the rich and complex history and contemporary art in new and exciting ways. There will also be a new basement gallery.

The refurbished town hall building will act as a gateway for exploring the city's other attractions. The St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust is working with the council and the University of Hertfordshire to take forward this project. In the New Year, the trust will launch a campaign to raise funds to help develop the new museum and gallery.

Mr Mike Gray, Chair of the St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust, said: "The development grant from the HLF is an amazing boost to our plans to create a new home for the Museum of St Albans. It will place it in the hub of the City. We will now work closely with our partners, including the council and the University of Hertfordshire, to take forward fundraising for this project. The funds we raise for this fantastic scheme will transform an historic landmark building into an inspirational museum and gallery for the community."

Cllr Annie Brewster, Mayor of the City and District of St Albans said: "This is the most exciting opportunity for St Albans, a grand central site that will showcase what we are about, then and now. Businesses and retailers will benefit from the improved image of the town hall. I see no reason why we should not be attracting new and exciting exhibitions of the quality of Damien Hirst or David Hockney for example in the near future. Watch out for some creative fundraising ideas which I hope schools, businesses, retailers and individuals can get involved with. It will be for us all."

Cllr Mike Wakely, Portfolio Holder for Sports, Leisure and Heritage for St Albans City and District Council, said: “This development grant helps underpin our bid for the balance of the £2.8m which we are seeking from the HLF for this amazing museum and gallery project. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a heritage centre that will attract visitors from across Hertfordshire and beyond to see St Albans’ heritage. I want to thank the HLF for recognising the importance of this project and our partners for their hard work. Particular thanks go to the St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust and the University of Hertfordshire. The trust will soon be launching a campaign to raise the additional funds required. Please get involved and help the trust to preserve your heritage for future generations.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: “This is an exciting opportunity to introduce new uses into a handsome town hall. This funding is the first step to providing a central cultural hub for local residents and the thousands of tourists that visit every year eager to explore the unique story of this city. We are very pleased to be supporting this project and look forward to working closely with the District Council as they progress their plans further.”

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.

About St Albans City and District Council’s museums service
The museums service runs the Museum of St Albans in Hatfield Road and Verulamium Museum in St Michael’s Street, both in St Albans. It also manages the medieval clock tower in the High Street, a field archaeology unit and associated excavations. More information about the museums, including the new museum and gallery project, is available on the museum's website.

About the St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust
The St Albans Museums and Galleries Trust is a registered charity which promotes and supports St Albans Museums.

About the University of Hertfordshire, UH Galleries
The University of Hertfordshire Galleries (UH Galleries) includes the Art and Design Gallery in Hatfield - and our new gallery space within the Museum of St Albans. UH Galleries presents international contemporary art to the community and wider audiences, in traditional and sometimes challenging ways. More information is available on the university's website.

For further information

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