Heritage Lottery Fund helps unlock Warwick's wonderful past

07/10/2011

The money will enable Warwick Town Council to transform the Court House - currently home to the town's Tourist Information Centre, civic assembly rooms and ballroom - by creating a new visitor centre designed to bring the story of the much-loved historic landmark to life for visitors and the local community alike. It will also help pay for conservation works to the Yeomanry Museum, located in the Court House basement, by improving environmental conditions for its collections and making them more accessible to the public.

The two-year project, called Unlocking Warwick, will also conserve and repair the building, improve access throughout, and see an exciting range of education, training, volunteering and interpretation activities made available, to increase people's understanding of the Court House's place in Warwick's history.

Designed and built by Francis Smith in 1725, Warwick Court House occupies an important site half way between Warwick Castle and St Mary's Church that was part of an old 16th century town plan. The Court House replaced an old medieval tavern - one of the few timber framed buildings to survive the Great Fire of Warwick in 1694. After the tragedy, which engulfed the town and destroyed 157 houses in under six hours, town planning changed radically and made builders review the way they constructed buildings forever. The effects can be clearly seen to this day in the beauty and symmetry of Warwick's architecture, which was largely constructed under the influence of the Smith brothers after the Fire Act of 1694.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "The Court House marks an important step change in British architecture and construction for Warwick. This project, while rejuvenating and conserving a much-loved town centre landmark, will also bring its fascinating story alive for future generations of locals and visitors alike."

The proposed works to the building - which was used as the Magistrates Court until 1970 and has since maintained an important role as the seat of Warwick Town Council's ceremonial and administrative functions - will see vital conservation to the exterior and interior take place.

It will also create two new part-time posts in the town to deliver a stimulating education and activity programme, which will involve 35 local volunteers and train up to 60 people in conservation techniques.

Trudy Offer, the Mayor of Warwick said: 'We are delighted and express our thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund that our bid has been successful. This news now unlocks the future of the building, for Warwick's local community and visitors to the town."

She continued: "The Town Council are also to carry out further works estimated at £370,000. New access to the building will be greatly improved, and the provision of a lift, kitchen, new toilets and renovation work to the Ballroom will encourage greater use for wedding receptions and small conferences."

Felicity Bunker, Chairman of the District Council said: "I congratulate the Town Council on their success and am pleased that the District's funding and other support for the works has made this scheme possible."

Chris White MP said: “This grant ensures the future of the Court House for both the local community and visitors and this gateway scheme will prove a boost to the towns visitor economy.”

Derek Maudlin, Clerk to Warwick Town Council, added: “The development team of DEK Architects and Cambron Limited has done very well and we are delighted that the hard work carried out so far has paid off.”

Anyone interested in supporting the project should contact the Clerk, Derek Maudlin, or register their interest on the Unlocking the Heritage of Warwick website.

Notes to editors

- The HLF grant to the project Unlocking the Heritage of Warwick is for £367,700 (77% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.
- 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 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK, including just under £340million in the West Midlands alone. To date, HLF has made 105 awards in Warwick amounting to just under £18million.

Further information

For more information on the project and refurbishment of the Court House please see the Unlocking the Heritage of Warwick website.

For further information, please contact Vicky Wilford, HLF press office, 020 7591 6046, vickyw@hlf.org.uk or Derek Maudlin, Warwick Town Council, 01926 411 694, townclerk@warwicktowncouncil.org.uk.