Hexham Abbey secures £1.8m grant for exciting project

31/05/2012

The landmark announcement follows more than a year of public fundraising.

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “Hexham Abbey has played a pivotal role in the lives of local people and visitors for hundreds of years. This project, that will restore and reunite the Abbey’s monastery buildings, will mean that the heritage of this special place is brought to life and provide a place for everyone to reflect, learn from and enjoy. HLF are incredibly proud to be supporting this project to protect a true heritage gem in the North East.”

“We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has announced that our second round application to has been confirmed in full,” said the Abbey’s Rector, Canon Graham Usher. “We are tremendously grateful to the HLF for its support for our mission to restore and redevelop the former monastery buildings to create a wonderful resource for the whole community.”

While the Abbey continues to prepare further applications to grant-making trusts in its bid to include the restoration of Hexham’s former Magistrates’ Courts in its redevelopment project, the news from the HLF is a major landmark in its ambitious project to redevelop its 13th century monastery complex 500 years after it was removed from the church by Henry VIII.

“The granting in full of our HLF application guarantees we can now move ahead with our work to restore our historic former monastic buildings for the benefit of the community,” said Canon Usher. “This very generous award from the HLF will help the Abbey to share its history more widely, unlock some of its hidden treasures, and serve the community for generations to come. We are immensely grateful to the HLF for supporting us in our efforts to restore these medieval buildings to full community use.”

The confirmation of the success of the application to the HLF follows the recent success of the Abbey’s public appeal to raise £400,000 for the project within 12 months.

“The support of individuals, grant-making trusts and organisations large and small has been truly amazing and inspiring,” said Canon Usher. “The success of our applications to the HLF and other grant-making trusts, in addition to the huge efforts of so many people in the community, means we now have a once-in-500-year opportunity to reunite our medieval monastic complex and restore and redevelop it for everyone.”

The restoration project includes the creation of a state-of-the-art visitor centre and community facilities within the former monastic complex adjoining the 7th century abbey church which dominates the heart of Hexham.

Visitors to the abbey, which has a 600-strong congregation, already contribute nearly £3m to the local economy and it is expected that the new facilities will significantly enhance the economic contribution it makes to the area.The complex at

the heart of the appeal adjoins the Grade I-listed abbey, which was founded in 674 AD by St Wilfrid and is home to many internationally renowned items including an original Saxon crypt which is thought to be one of only two intact Saxon buildings of its type in the world.

The monastic buildings which adjoin the abbey were taken from the abbey in 1537 by Henry VIII. They then passed through various owners before being sold to the local authority, which plans to gift the buildings back to the abbey as part of the project.

“We now have the opportunity to reunite this historic site and restore it to its full role in the community,” said Canon Usher. “It’s a tremendous project which will take this historic place into the next 1,000 years or so of its life.The support of HLF as the major funder to the project is magnificent.”

Notes to editors

- The Hexham Abbey Project to develop the church and restore its medieval former monastic complex and the former Hexham Magistrates’ Courts is estimated to cost £3.2m.
- Now that the Heritage Lottery Fund has confirmed in full the Abbey’s stage 2 application for £1.8m towards the project, work can begin later this year on the Carnaby Building.
- The Abbey has still to raise more than £200,000 to fund the restoration of the former Magistrates’ Court and applications to grant-making trusts are now being prepared.
- The newly restored former monastery complex is due to open in September 2013

A confirmed HLF award means that money had already been earmarked by HLF for the project in question and that the full amount has now been secured.

The Hexham Abbey project will provide:

- Permanent meeting spaces for both religious and secular groups.
- A large space for community activities, celebrations and events.
- Exhibition spaces to display the Abbey’s historic treasures.
- Interpretation spaces to tell the Abbey’s long and fascinating history.
- Educational areas where people of all ages can study the significance of the Abbey in more detail and explore contemporary social issues.
- Outdoor space where children can play and performances can be given.
- A herb garden and place for quiet reflection.
- Essential amenities including toilets and a kitchen.
- Space for lectures and seminars.
- An archive and research facility.
- Quiet areas for private study and contemplation.
- Educational resources including information boards, interactive displays and audio-visual equipment.
- An archive facility.
- Support facilities for the outreach work of the Abbey’s Education Officer.

Further information

To learn more about the Hexham Project, please contact Jane Gibson, Hexham Abbey, on 01434 602 031 or email heritage@hexhamabbey.org.uk

Laura Bates, Heritage Lottery Fund press office, on 020 7591 6027 or lbates@hlf.org.uk