Historic church is born again

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St Margaret's Church at Ward End, is rarely used for regular worship and is at risk from vandalism and deterioration. The historic Grade II listed building will now get a new lease of life as a hub for community use at the same time giving local volunteers a chance to gain a range of research and heritage skills.

The project is being led by St Margaret's Community Trust which has carried out widespread consultation to find out how local people would like to see the building used in the future. Already a large number of community groups, covering a range of topics including housing, local history, mental health support and a choir have shown interest in using the new space.

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "This is a building, in a priority area for HLF, that is held in much affection by local residents of all backgrounds who have taken an active interest in its history and its preservation. Its restoration and conversion will enable it once more to serve the local community but in a new and re-invigorated way."

The project will repair and restore the building dating from 1833 and its surrounding churchyard. Historic aspects of the building, including a memorial to Birmingham's first historian William Hutton, and two stained glass windows by pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones will also be preserved in the building.

In addition, the grant will pay for a heritage centre manager who will help recruit volunteers and devise a programme of research giving local people the chance to discover more about the church's history and other local heritage in order to create an online archive for use by schools, students and the wider public. Volunteers will also be trained to act as guides for heritage visits to the building.

The work will be carried out in tandem with the creation of a new community resource centre within part of the church, which is being funded by a £300,000 grant from The Veolia Environmental Trust, awarded through their Veolia Cre8 programme.

It is estimated that, once the new community hub is up and running it will be used by some 8,000 people a year with 150 volunteering opportunities for local residents.

Among the heritage artefacts preserved in the church are a memorial to Solomon Bray, Birmingham's first town clerk. There is also a rare and unusual William IV coat of arms and an oak desk dating from 1637 which is thought to have been used for recording church records.

Notes to editors

The Veolia Environmental Trust has been supporting community and environmental projects for over 13 years. Under the Landfill Communities Fund, landfill site operators can donate a percentage, currently 5.6%, of their landfill tax payment to these projects.

Since it was established in 1997, Veolia Environmental Services (UK) plc has made contributions to the Trust of over £49million to 1400 projects. It has helped fund a diverse range of projects, including the repair of woodland footpaths,

the renovation of community halls and the installation of playgrounds and play areas. For more information, or to find out how to apply for funding, visit the Veolia Trust website.

The Trust board introduced the Veolia Cre8 Funding Challenge in 2010 as a stand-alone grant for four creative, adventurous, exciting and ambitious ideas that will make a difference to people's lives and will best meet the following eight objectives:

Involve volunteers; leave a legacy; bring generations together; benefit all sectors of society; involve the community; allow those involved to develop new skills; help improve health and wellbeing; and be fun!

Further information

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