Plans progress to transform historic church into mental wellbeing centre

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The development funding enables the East Suffolk Mind, the charity committed to improving the lives of people with mental health issues and the Churches Conservation Trust, the national charity protecting historic churches at risk to develop plans to save this Grade II building. ESM and CCT can then compete for a full HLF £2.8m award to bring the plans to life. The shared vision of the ESM and CCT is to bring St Mary at the Quay back into the heart the community as a wellbeing centre that everyone can use. St Mary at the Quay was closed in 1973 and is cared for by the CCT.

The transformation of the historic church will allow ESM to use the therapeutic value of heritage, arts and creativity and the unique environment and rich histories of this beautiful and restful building to help everyone improve the wellbeing of their mind, body and spirit.

Set in Ipswich's regeneration area, a transformed St Mary at the Quay will provide a space for all the community including a workshop, performance and exhibition area for heritage and arts activity and learning as well as areas for alternative therapies; reflection and contemplation. The building will also become a meeting point, where people can come together to learn, explore and exchange in activities touched and influenced by the unique heritage of the building and the site.

The CCT and ESM will also be partnering with New Economics Foundation – an independent think-and-do tank that inspires and demonstrates real economic well-being - to develop a new academic study that explores the links between beautiful buildings and the positive effect they have on our wellbeing and state of mind.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "This is a really exciting project which makes interesting links between heritage and mental wellbeing. The Heritage Lottery Fund's initial support gives the green light to East Suffolk Mind's development work. Whilst this is just the beginning of the journey to secure a full grant, we hope that by providing some additional upfront money they will be able to progress plans over the coming months."

Jo Searle, East Suffolk Mind, said: "Mental wellbeing impacts on us all. The plans for St Mary at the Quay will help reduce the stigma attached to mental health issues by providing a space and services for everyone to address their mind, body and spirit. We are delighted that this project is being supported, and look forward to continuing the development work with the Heritage Lottery Fund and ultimately to deliver this innovative partnership project which will see both the rejuvenation of a building of such significant heritage value, and the provision of new and exciting well being opportunities for people in Suffolk."

Loyd Grossman, Chairman, The Churches Conservation Trust, said: "We are thrilled that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given its support for our project at St Mary at the Quay. Not only does it enable us to save this historic church for future generations by bringing it back into the heart of the community but also provides an opportunity to explore the links between heritage, beautiful buildings and mental wellbeing.

"The plans for St Mary at the Quay will enhance wellbeing, empower people and encourage them to learn and connect with their heritage and bring the church back into everyday use, for everyone to enjoy."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund 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, the HLF invests in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Situated in the historic docklands area of Ipswich, St Mary at the Quay was built, or perhaps rebuilt, between 1450 and 1550. It shows an impressive unity of style, with handsome arcades and elegant perpendicular windows filling the building with light. Most remarkable is the wonderful double hammerbeam roof over the nave, one of the earliest of its type, with carved figures of the apostles and other worthies and less formal images in the spandrels. There is a handsome octagonal 15th century font.

It is one of twelve mediaeval churches in Ipswich and one of three mariners' churches in the old dockland area, once the home of Ipswich's thriving merchant community. The economic focus of Ipswich had moved away by the 18th century and the church and its congregation declined. Flooding caused problems over many years, and bombs in 1940-42 damaged the church and led to closure. It was repaired with the help of Friends of Friendless Churches, and became the Ipswich headquarters of the Boys' Brigade. When they left it was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust in 1973 and remains consecrated.

The Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) is the national charity protecting historic churches at risk. We've saved over 340 beautiful buildings which attract more than 1.5 million visitors a year. With our help and with your support they are kept open and in use – living once again at the heart of their communities.

The CCT saves churches by working with local people to bring them back into the heart of the community for every day use as a social, tourism, educational or community resource. The charity requires a minimum of £9 million (£1.5m per year, for the next six years), to fill its funding shortfall. The charity receives its churches in the form of 'vestings' from the Church Commissioners and currently has 340 churches in its care - the largest single collection of historic churches in the country. All the CCT's churches remain consecrated and are often used for occasional worship. The charity's churches were visited by 1.3m people last year - making the Trust's estate is one of the leading visitor attractions in the UK.

The CCT is currently involved in over 100 conservation and regeneration projects ranging from planned repairs, major conservation work and multi-million regeneration and reuse schemes. It's care of its Grade I and II* buildings has given the Trust an international reputation in conservation and regeneration of buildings. Current examples range from a community and mental health wellbeing centres through to conserving the church used by Charles Dickens. Chairman of the Trust is Loyd Grossman OBE FSA, who was appointed in 2007, and Crispin Truman is Chief Executive. The Churches Conservation Trust was established under Ecclesiastical Law on 1 April 1969.

Further information

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