Home of the ‘Bloomsbury Set’ wins £2.4million

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Set in an idyllic country spot near Lewes, and now lying in the heart of the South Downs National Park, Charleston became a country retreat for a group of influential writers, artists and intellectuals that included Virginia Woolf, T.S Elliot, John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry and Lytton Strachey – all of whom had a profound influence on the shaping of early 20th century British and international modernism. The HLF grant, part of a £6.3million scheme, will see the former home of artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant reconnected to its surrounding agricultural buildings and the landscape that inspired so much of their work.

The expansion will deliver much-needed facilities to the thousands of visitors that flock to this iconic literary site each year. It will offer exciting new education and exhibition spaces and heritage activities designed to embrace the site’s fascinating heritage. New training opportunities will also be offered to 200 volunteers and 15 internship positions will be created.

Capital works include the restoration of the magnificent Charleston Barn, the recreation of the granary that stood on the site until the 1970s and the creation of new buildings in a hidden courtyard behind the barn.

The project will also see the creation of a dedicated auditorium, a beautiful new studio learning space, proper storage for the Trust’s reserve collection of over 8,000 works, and an expanded café and shop. A new access route will take traffic away from the heart of the site to a new and less obtrusive car park, and the sensitive restoration of existing buildings, removal of traffic and the recreation of the lost granary will return Charleston to the way it looked in the 1950s.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “This inspirational and important project showcases our heritage at its very best, by providing the local community and visitors with a special look into the past. Heritage Lottery Fund money continues to revitalise and transform historic sites like Charleston into sustainable places for the future, offering a wide range of training and volunteering opportunities as well as working to improve it as a fascinating tourist attraction.”

The Trust’s Director, Colin McKenzie, said: “We are enormously grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for this major grant to one of the most important house museums in Sussex. Having the HLF’s support and their endorsement of our plans will make a huge difference to our ability to realize this important and exciting project”.

Nigel Newton, Chairman of the Charleston Trust, commented: “We are delighted that this fantastic support from the Heritage Lottery Fund will enable us to take Charleston towards its ambitious new goals.”

Virginia Nicholson, granddaughter of Vanessa Bell, said: “I have known and loved this house and its surrounding buildings for over fifty years. I played on the farm as a child, and I am delighted to think that Charleston has such an exciting future in the 21st century.”

Finally, Norman Baker, MP for Lewes, said: “This is great news and I want to applaud those who have worked so hard to secure the funding, and the Heritage Lottery Fund for providing the grant. Charleston is an important cultural centre in the area with beneficial economic effects for tourism and I know the money will ensure that it can become even more

accessible, and valuable to the public."

Have your say: HLF's three-month consultation Shaping the future – for heritage, for everyone is now live on our website and all views will help shape HLF's strategy from 2013 to 2019. This is people's chance to tell us what they think we should continue to do and what we should do differently. For further information go to the consultation page, until 26 April 2011.

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project Charleston Barn Project is for £2,400,000 (38% of project costs) and is a confirmed award.

The Charleston Trust is a registered charity that was founded in 1981 to restore and maintain the home of the Bloomsbury group artists, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, for the benefit of the public. Over many years the house was a hub of artistic creativity and intellectual dynamism, with regular visitors including Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes (whose home it was from 1916-1925), Lytton Strachey, TS Eliot, EM Forster and Roger Fry. Charleston is now the only complete example of Bell and Grant's decorative work, including early pieces from the Omega Workshops.

Charleston is open to the public from April-October each year.

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