The Sky's The Limit

18/01/2011

The Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) has been successful in its first-round* bid to restore the Devonport Column as part of the continued regeneration of the Devonport area. RIO has been awarded £21,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund, with additional support from Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership, to develop the scheme and to take the project forward.

Following the successful redevelopment and reopening of Devonport Guildhall as a thriving social enterprise hub, community space and venue, RIO teamed up with the Le Page Architects and Plymouth City Council to submit an application to restore the column, which has now been given the green light by funders to progress to the next stage. With the funding, RIO is planning to develop a scheme to turn the run down column into a tourist and leisure destination for Plymouth and an asset for the developing Devonport community.

The project plans includes the careful renovation of the Column using traditional techniques, the development of a green space and nature reserve, the creation of an education programme and research post, in partnership with the University of Plymouth, and the innovative installation of a mesh WI-FI system to provide local residents with low cost broadband, which will be a real economic and social boost in an area where take up of internet usage has been traditionally low.

Ed Whitelaw, RIO's lead developer for the Devonport Guildhall, says: "What a great way to start the New Year! The Column was built as a symbol of Devonport's confidence and independence, it is only right that now, given the success of the local regeneration, we have this opportunity to restore it. Though this is really great news from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this is only the first hurdle. We now enter a phase of public consultation and must work up the detail of the scheme. While we can do our bit, we will need to demonstrate public support and raise some additional private investment for the scheme."

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, says: "We are extremely pleased to be supporting this project which could see this important landmark restored and an exciting programme developed to enable local people to appreciate its full value. We look forward to seeing how Real Ideas Organisation delivers the strong potential of the project over the next few months."

Teresa Lakeman, Head of Programmes at Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership, says: "We are delighted to hear that RIO's initial bid has been successful and very much hope to see the Column restored to the same standard as the refurbished Guildhall."

Councillor Ian Bowyer, Cabinet Member for Finance Property, People and Governance at Plymouth City Council, said: "We are delighted with this news as the funding will allow Real Ideas Organisation to progress a scheme to revitalise an historic feature that is important, not just for Devonport, but for the whole city. Through their successful restoration and revitalisation of the Guildhall, RIO has shown it is a safe pair of hands for the city's historic assets and we look forward to working with them to make sure this comes to fruition."

Notes to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

On occasion an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

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 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.