Oldest Methodist building in the world takes first step towards a new future

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The New Room, known as the ‘cradle of Methodism’ and widely regarded as the most important Methodist heritage site in the world, is seeking to construct a new three-storey building in the Horsefair Courtyard next to the Grade I listed chapel which will transform its visitor facilities.

Under the plans, the new building would include an archives room, a resource library housing an extensive library on Methodist history, and a large multi-media lecture and education room, capable of accommodating 60 people.

There would also be a refreshment area, kitchen and a lift to provide disabled access to all levels of the new building, which would be linked to the New Room by a glass roof. The new building has been designed so that it does not adversely affect either the New Room or the streetscape by following the pattern of the buildings that used to exist within the Horsefair Courtyard until they were demolished in the 1940s. The new building would also free up space in the Preachers’ Rooms upstairs to expand the existing accredited museum by over 40% and so provide room for a larger themed heritage museum, including dedicated exhibitions on the Wesleys and Bristol, anti-slavery, social justice and transatlantic Methodism.

Rev. A Ward Jones, Chair of the New Room Trustees, said: "Our current facilities do not reflect the historic importance of this building and our need to be able to properly welcome and inform visitors about this place. Bristol was the most significant city in John Wesley’s ministry and it was here at the New Room that here he established the template for the Methodist movement that has now become an international Christian denomination of over 75million members around the world. He used it for many purposes but primarily there was a focus on education and we want to develop our work in this area but cannot do so without the new building and appropriate resources necessary to deliver such provision."

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “John Wesley’s New Room is a hidden heritage gem in the heart of urban Bristol and widely regarded as the most important Methodist building in world. HLF’s initial support means that further project plans can be developed that will transform and expand the New Room’s visitor offer, vastly improve storage facilities for its internationally important archives and provide a host of wonderfully interactive community activities for all to learn from and enjoy.”

The New Room was originally built in 1739 and extended in 1748 by John Wesley at the outset of his work in creating a religious revival in Britain and America. Above the chapel, which was the first to be licensed for Methodist preaching, are the Preachers' Rooms where John Wesley and other preachers could stay when in Bristol or en route to preaching engagements in the South West, Wales and Ireland. The New Room was also the starting point for many figures associated with the establishment of the Methodist movement in America.

The New Room, which is located in the heart of Bristol city centre, is open six days a week throughout the year and receives around 25,000 visitors per annum. It enjoys the support of more than two hundred volunteers, many of whom are stewards who welcome visitors to the chapel.

Notes to editors

HLF initial support, or first-round pass, means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project 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. This project has received development funding of £56,200 to help progress their plans.

Further information

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