Lottery boost for Witham Hall

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This two-year project, part of a wider regeneration scheme for Barnard Castle and the Witham, will restore the building and transform it into a heritage learning centre for the local community. Up to 50 volunteers will play a major role in the project and help deliver a range of visitor activities.

Alongside this new programme of activity the building will provide improved facilities for a wide-range of community, business and cultural activities including cultural events, craft groups, afternoon club, workshops, conferences and studio spaces. A new community engagement officer will be recruited and will take the lead with the educational and community activities.

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “HLF are delighted to be supporting this project that will totally rejuvenate a much-loved building, bringing it back to the heart of the community for everyone to use and enjoy. It demonstrates how a heritage building, while providing an important link to a community’s roots, can also be adapted for the needs of today.”

Exhibitions, workshops, talks and guided tours will encourage local people and visitors learn about the heritage of the building, the town and the people who have lived and worked there over the years.

Witham Hall opened in 1846 as a memorial to local philanthropist, landowner and geologist Henry Witham. Originally used as a dispensary for the sick, the building was also used as the Mechanics Institute, which sought to educate the poor. In the 1860s, it was extended to include a music hall and from then on the Witham has continued to serve a community function, used for social events, as a cinema, a town council office and a library.

Currently used as meeting rooms, the building also houses a large archive of local newspaper - the Teesdale Mercury, and also houses Fitzhugh Library - an independent local history archive run by volunteers.

Cabinet member for regeneration and economic development, Councillor Neil Foster, said: “I am grateful to HLF for such generous support for a scheme which I know will result in a much loved community asset fulfilling a vibrant role once again.This major regeneration programme will deliver a wonderful centre for art and culture alongside a state-of-the-art Customer Access Point and revamped public library. I feel sure when complete it will more than meet expectations.”

Further information
For the Heritage Lottery Fund, please contact Laura Bates on 020 7591 6027 or lbates@hlf.org.uk.

For the Witham regeneration scheme contact the Media Relations Team at Durham County Council 0191 372 7664.