£1.6m Lottery grant to fund new home for archive

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City of York Council's 'Gateway to History' project will refurbish the first floor of York Explore Library Learning Centre into the new home for York's archives, including a new archive storage vault built to 21st century conservation standards.

The project will reach out to communities across the city to get them involved in adding their stories to the 850 years of documents already preserved in the archive which records all aspects of the city's history from complaints about mediaeval prostitutes, the city's reaction to the death of Richard III, the growing influence of railways and the Rowntree family on the Victorian city to the defence of York in the Second World War.

Councillor Sonja Crisp, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Tourism, said: "This is such brilliant news as we approach the finale of York 800. York has the most important city archive outside London, and this generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund means that it will start the next 800 years in better condition and open to more people than ever before. The Archive is the permanent record of the lives of all of the people of York from 1155 and now, thanks to the HLF, more people than ever before are going to be able to use it and to be part of it. I want to thank the many hundreds of residents who contributed their ideas on how we can use this grant to create a living archive that will represent all our citizens for all time.

Fiona Spiers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund for Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "Centuries of life in what was once England's second city are detailed in this revealing and fascinating archive. We are delighted to support this project that will give the city's present day inhabitants many new opportunities to discover how their predecessors lived.

Richard Taylor, City of York Council's Archives Manager, said: "The Gateway to History project has been seeking to secure a sustainable future for the city archive and this HLF grant will cover 88% of the project costs. The balance will be met by the council which will use this opportunity to complete the refurbishment of York Explore. This will include installing a new energy-efficient heating system, repairing the roof, refreshing the layout of the ground floor and the very successful cafe. Building work on the new archive is expected to start in summer 2013 and complete in early 2014 with as much as possible of York Explore staying open during the works."

The project team will be inviting local people to get involved by joining the project advisory board, and to act as 'Archive Champions' for their neighbourhood or community organisation. The project also has an email address for comments, suggestions and feedback at gatewaytohistory@york.gov.uk.

Notes to editors

The York 800 programme marks the 800 years since the city was granted a Royal Charter by King John in 1212, allowing York to take charge of its own affairs by electing a council, creating the post of mayor, and giving its people a voice. A huge array of events throughout the year will give residents the chance to get involved in the celebrations especially, Charter Weekend on 7-9 July. Many more details of the year-long programme are available by visiting the York800 website.

The York City Archive is where the lives of York's people are recorded for the future. The archive is one of the city's most important heritage assets – preserving the original documents which record the experiences and voices of thousands of citizens, and how they have governed their City. The oldest document in the archives - Henry II's charter of c1155 – is older than both York Minster and the city walls. The archive contains over 300 cubic metres of documents in thousands of boxes which would encircle the city if laid end to end.

The council's five key priorities for 2011-2015 are:
• Create jobs and grow the economy
• Get York moving
• Build strong communities
• Protect vulnerable people
• Protect the environment

Further information

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