Major grants for three Solway churches

30/11/2012

A grant of £22,476 from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2007-13 through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. In addition the project has been awarded a grant of £3,000 from the Diocese of Carlisle's Pastoral Account.

The Three Solway Churches Development Project aims to open up the three participating churches in a totally new way to share their rich heritage with the local communities and visitors – including those who come from all over the world to use the Hadrian's Wall Path and Cycleway, which passes close to all three churches and brings over 20,000 people to the area each year. In addition it is planned to offer the churches as an educational resource for local schools, as well as schools across Cumbria, including those with special access needs. Discussions are also taking place with Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust, in Carlisle, to enable a partnership for joint activities.

The Development Project, which will start in the new year and be completed during 2013, will see a Welcome/Information panel installed at St. Michael's, Bowness-on-Solway, and five historical information panels, welcoming and informing visitors, at St. Mary's, Beaumont.

Major works are planned for St. Michael's, Burgh-by-Sands and will include re-opening the West doorway of the church (blocked up in the 1880s) to provide an alternative and additional entrance, with level access for wheelchairs and those with mobility difficulties, as well as also reinstating a historic feature of the church. Installation of a time-line of "stepping stones" alongside the church path will give key historical dates relating to the area. Finally, the West tower will be opened up and historical information panels provided on the church's links with King Edward I (whose body lay in State there after his death on nearby Burgh Marsh in 1307) and the Border Reivers (the tower was used as a defensive refuge for the population during cross-border raids, while their farm animals were sheltered within the church itself).

Further improvements include a WC suitable for both able-bodied and disabled use; tea and coffee making facilities; and a tap where visitors, including Hadrian's Wall walkers and cyclists can fill water bottles at any time.

With the help and support of Burgh-by-Sands School, Kirkbampton School, Bowness-on-Solway School and Caldewlea School, learning materials for school visits and provisions for role play and re-enactments of the historic events of the area for schoolchildren will also be provided.

Grants received earlier from the News and Star Charitable Trust, the Stephen Clarke Trust and the Alan Evans Memorial Trust, have enabled pre-Project work including archaeological evaluations to be carried out, to ensure there should be no archaeological impediment to the works proceeding. The total cost of the Project will be £115,000 and the balance required will be met from funds raised by St. Michael's, Burgh-by-Sands.

The Project has the wholehearted support of the Hadrian's Wall Trust and many local businesses in the area, which see that what is planned as enriching the communities' knowledge of their heritage, offering real opportunities for education and enhancing what is offered to those visiting the area.

Project Leader Carolyne Baines, Churchwarden of St. Michael's, Burgh-by-Sands, said: "The Three Solway Churches Development Project is a most exciting development and we are all hugely grateful to HLF, RDPE, the Carlisle Diocese

and all those who have given and promised support, both for their encouragement and also for their vision in seeing the immense possibilities which the Project will open up. We are greatly looking forward to getting started and delivering a project which we are confident will bring real benefits to the area, to many individuals and to heritage and education."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "This project will totally rejuvenate much-loved buildings, bringing them back to the heart of the community for everyone to use and enjoy. They demonstrate how heritage buildings, which provide an important link to a community's roots, can also be adapted for the needs of today" and a representative of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) said "We are extremely pleased to be able to support this Project, which will enhance the cultural heritage of the area for the benefit of both the local community and visitors."