Heritage Lottery Fund backs Heritage Centre for the Washburn Valley

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Situated between Harrogate and Otley the development, to be known as The Washburn Heritage Centre, lies in a protected landscape within the southern end of the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It aims to open up, preserve and promote the rich natural, archaeological and industrial heritage of the area to local people and visitors through an extensive range of events and activities.

The project, to be run by Fewston with Blubberhouses Parochial Church Council (FBPCC) and supported by Yorkshire Water (YW), the AONB and specialist groups such as Claro Archaeological Society and the Wharfedale Naturalists, will see the creation of new heritage trails. At least twenty-four volunteers will be trained as new heritage guides/wardens. The centre will be used for community and cultural events and exhibitions, and will provide a source of information and locally sourced refreshments for visitors, a base for visiting groups such as school parties or elderly people’s clubs, and a venue for adult learning.

The new Heritage Centre will be created by adding an extension to the Church in a style sympathetic to the surroundings, and will be housed within an innovative design, created by Pearce Bottomley Architects of Aberford. This will provide a spacious meeting area, kitchen and toilets, and create employment for 3 people including a part-time Heritage Development Officer. The grant will also restore heritage aspects of the church.

The Washburn Valley includes Iron Age settlements, the Civil War sites, the remains of mines and quarries and the dams and reservoirs constructed by the water board. The area also contains remains of an 18th century flax and linen mill which housed the largest waterwheel in Europe at the time. There are 6 Grade I listed, 5 Grade II* and 109 Grade II listed buildings in the valley.

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "The Washburn Valley area, which is visited by many walkers from around Yorkshire and further afield, has a fascinating history. We are delighted to see the project go ahead, which will enable this to be shared with the local community and visitors alike."

Commenting on the Heritage Lottery Fund award, Ann Johnson, the Parochial Church Council Secretary and Chairman of the Washburn Heritage Centre Project Group, said: "The Heritage Centre will give us tremendous opportunities for community events, for working with other groups on heritage related activities, and for giving both local people and visitors to the Washburn Valley an understanding of its history. The work involved in developing the project so far and in fundraising has brought many people in the community together, and we have had an amazing amount of support and co-operation from a wide variety of other groups and organisations."