Northern Counties first in UK to secure innovative



Outside view of Northern Counties Building

Derry~Londonderry's iconic Northern Counties building is the first project in the UK to secure a confirmed grant from an innovative new grant programme from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), designed to stimulate local economic growth by unlocking the commercial potential of unused historic buildings and sites.

Through the new Heritage Enterprise grant programme, HLF has awarded £784,000 to the Inner City Building Preservation Trust (ICBT) which plans to turn the vacant building into a boutique hotel and restaurant, creating 45 jobs, providing training opportunities and boosting the city's tourism potential.

The new grant programme is designed to help when the cost of restoring important buildings is so high that without additional financial intervention, putting it back into use would not be commercially viable. It is specifically funding vital repairs and conservation works to the Northern Counties building, converting it into the safe, usable and inspirational space required for a boutique hotel.

With a commitment of at least £25million per annum over the next five years and offering grants between £100,000 and £5million, HLF's new scheme is empowering not-for-profit organisations like ICBT to work in partnership with the private sector to rescue and return neglected historic buildings to productive use.

Paul Mullan, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund NI, said: “We are extremely proud of Heritage Enterprise. We launched the programme in conjunction with new research that showed rather than a hindrance to growth, historic buildings and historic quarters are the very places where new ideas and new growth are most likely to happen. Commercial businesses based in the historic buildings of our major cities are more productive and generate more wealth than is the average for all commercial businesses across the whole economy.

“This new programme is allowing us to support the vital partnerships needed between the community and the private sector to unlock the commercial potential of neglected treasures like The Northern Counties so they can once again contribute to the economic success of their local communities.”

Helen Quigley, Managing Director of the Inner City Building Preservation Trust, said: “We’re thrilled to have secured this funding and really excited about breathing new life into what is one of the city’s great buildings. Derry has a great architectural heritage, and bringing the Northern Counties back into use will boost the economy, provide jobs and help tourism.”

The Northern Counties on Bishop Street is a Category B1 listed building which was built in 1899 and is a well known landmark in the city centre. For many years it was a private members’ club, and a base for the city’s business and civic leaders.

When the club closed it housed offices for a time before becoming vacant in 2006.

Northern Counties is now on course to be restored to its former glory and take pride of place as one of the city’s finest buildings. This latest restoration project consolidates previous and on going work on other historic buildings in the London Street and Bishop Street area. The boutique hotel will act as a catalyst for the further development of the heritage tourism that has been developing in Derry~Londonderry and marks yet another significant investment of HLF funding into Derry city.

Notes to editors

Heritage Enterprise applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

Heritage Enterprise was created after a major piece of research *New ideas need old buildings* revealed the positive impact historic buildings have on the UK’s economy and their proven ability to contribute to growth. The key findings of the analysis demonstrated a commercial business based in a historic building generates more wealth than is the average for the UK economy as a whole.

The research was commissioned by the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. The analysis of business use within listed buildings was undertaken by Colliers International, using data supplied by ProMap, with further work on economic impacts undertaken by Oxford Economics. The market research survey of businesses occupying listed buildings was carried out by Spirul Research. HLF is also grateful to Historic Scotland, Cadw and Dept Environment Northern Ireland for supplying data on listed buildings.

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £192million to more than 1,000 projects across Northern Ireland.

Further information

Please contact Nick Garbutt on 07808 052 416.

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