Abbey Lawn Trust wins Lottery support for the Old Baptist Chapel

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The project aims to maximise the heritage and learning potential of the Old Baptist Chapel (OBC), a late 15th century Grade II building in the historic heart of the town.

Development funding of £3,900 has also been awarded to help the Abbey Lawn Trust progress its plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

The OBC Interpretation Project, which starts in December 2013, has the following main aims:

- To interpret and record the building's architecture and history, from domestic use to early Baptist meeting house and through to the present day.
- To explore the role the OBC played in the development of the wider community, both secular and religious.
- To develop a range of education resources and workshops based on the OBC.
- To integrate the building into the Abbey Lawn Trust's current heritage and education provision.

The OBC began life as a three-bay hall house and circa 1690 it was adapted for use as a Baptist meeting house and then 'modernised' in around 1720. In 1805 a new and larger Baptist chapel was opened in Tewkesbury and the OBC was sub-divided into two cottages, with the remains of the chapel between. In 1976, Tewkesbury Borough Council, recognising the exceptional character and architectural quality of the OBC, leased the building on a 99 year lease and undertook a substantial programme of restoration, aimed at returning the building to its early 18th century state.

In June 2012, the Abbey Lawn Trust took over the management of the OBC on a trial basis for an initial two year period, to ascertain if it was possible to run it in conjunction with its existing heritage sites. The experiment has proved highly successful, and the Abbey Lawn Trust is, with HLF support, seeking to make the arrangement permanent.

Currently the building is being used and enjoyed by increasing numbers of visitors and school parties and visitor surveys have revealed great support for seeing the building put to the fore of attractions within historic Tewkesbury. There are also still many mysteries, which research hopes to solve, connected with the history of the OBC, not least of which concerns just how early in the 17th century it was being used as a Baptist meeting house. Subject to the results of the research it may be revealed that it is indeed the oldest meeting house still in existence in Britain.

Simon Lawton, Museum Curator for the Abbey Lawn Trust, said: ''We have been using the Old Baptist Chapel for a number of years and managing it formally since June 2013, and have always known that the building has the potential to be developed further as a heritage site of interest to both residents of Tewkesbury and to visitors to the town. We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us its support and it's superb to know that we are a step closer to furthering our aim of ensuring that the OBC continues to be appreciated by future generations.''

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "Today's initial HLF support is an important first step for the Old Baptist Chapel. It paves the way for an exciting project that aims to transform the building into a sustainable heritage resource for the local community and visitors. We are looking forward to working with the Abbey Lawn Trust as their plans develop over the coming months."

Notes to editors

About The Abbey Lawn Trust

The Abbey Lawn Trust is a buildings preservation charity that holds in trust certain historic buildings and gardens within the precincts of Tewkesbury Abbey, and preserves and cares for them for the enjoyment of the people of Tewkesbury and visitors to the town. With the aim of educating the public in the history, architecture, natural history and geography of the area, the trust runs the John Moore Museum (including the Merchant's House), as well as maintaining the Secret Garden, a pleasure garden adjoining the ground of Tewkesbury Abbey.

Further information

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