Plans progress for Piece Hall transformation

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Calderdale Council has been given the ‘green light’ to progress an application for a £7million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, and they have been awarded £239,700 in development funding to work up plans towards the redevelopment of the historic Piece Hall in Halifax.

The first-round pass* means the Council can progress their plans for the building, which is one of the most architecturally significant in Yorkshire and of national importance. The project is expected to be a major driving force behind the economic regeneration of Halifax and aims to place the architectural, cultural and social heritage of The Piece Hall back on the regional and national stage. The Council now have up to two years to submit a more detailed application to HLF for the full grant award of £7 million.

Each year, over one million people walk through the Grade I listed Piece Hall’s open courtyard. Designed by Thomas Bradley and opened in 1779 as place for cloth manufacturers to trade ‘pieces’, the building dominated the small half-timbered medieval hill town of 18th century Halifax. Unique in the UK, the huge fortress-like structure echoes the grandeur of a pre-industrialised age and the wealth and ambition of traders who once conducted their business there. During the Industrial Revolution the spread of new technologies and the advent of the great mills of the north saw the extinction of small scale cloth merchants, and the Piece Hall went into decline.

Whilst currently underused as an open civic space, the Council hopes to transform the Piece Hall into a vibrant European-style piazza in keeping with the Hall’s 18th-century Italian architecture. A space will also be created to explain the important role that the Hall has played in Yorkshire’s history.

The project, expected to total £16 million, will see the Piece Hall transformed into a ‘state of the art’ visitor destination boasting quality shops, restaurants and creative businesses. The centrepiece of the scheme is the upgrading of the courtyard into a vibrant town square, complete with fountains, stone seating and a large performance area - including a moveable stage - to be used for large scale events. The heritage value of the Piece Hall will be significantly enhanced through the addition of a new visitor centre and a state of the art education facility for schools and community groups.

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for Yorkshire and the Humber, said: “We look forward to working further with Calderdale Council to develop their plans for a full award to restore this magnificent building, so that this historical and architectural gem of the North may be enjoyed by future generations.”

Commenting on the award, Leader of Calderdale Council Cllr Stephen Baines, said: “We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given its initial support to our plans. The Piece Hall is a magnificent building and an important part of Halifax’s history. Originally built to house the prosperous cloth trade here 230 years ago, we now have an opportunity to ensure that the Piece Hall plays a significant part in the next chapter of Halifax’s story, with a pivotal role at the heart of the town’s cultural and economic life for many generations to come.”

Councillor Ian Cooper, Calderdale Council's Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities, commented: "This is a terrific vote of confidence in our plans, giving us the opportunity to put the Piece Hall back at the heart of Calderdale's rich cultural life where it belongs. Heritage Lottery Fund's support is clear recognition of the inspired vision and hard work of the team and I look forward to seeing some very exciting plans take shape."

The Piece Hall plans are part of a wider redevelopment in a historic part of Halifax that includes the Square Chapel Centre for the Arts. Plans are in place to extend Square Chapel to include a second auditorium which will be a multi-functional space to house workshops, cinema screenings and live music alongside a bigger café/bar area, ensuring visitors are well catered for, culturally and literally. There will also be a direct entrance to the centre from the Piece Hall as well as one on Blackledge, making a physical link between these two iconic buildings. Square Chapel's thriving volunteer programme will be shared with the Piece Hall and will form the basis of volunteering opportunities aimed at bringing the heritage of the Piece Hall to life.

Notes to editors

* A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

On occasion an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

The Piece Hall designs have been drawn up by award-winning Derbyshire architects Evans Vettori, working with conservation architect Jessica Sutcliffe and landscape architect Whitelaw Turkington.

The Grade I listed building's fine Georgian architecture has long been the subject of great admiration. Described by architectural historian Prof James Stevens Curl as 'one of the grandest Classical sights in England', it was conceived in 1774 as an ambitious and imposing structure to offer facilities for the woollen cloth trade.

Further information

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