Full Marks for Plans to Restore Historic School

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Ambitious plans to breathe new life into a historic building within Derry's City Walls have been given 'full marks' by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), it was announced today. The Cresco Trust proposals to transform the disused London Street Cathedral School into a social enterprise centre received the support of the HLF and a grant award of £832,000.

Built in 1891, the B1 listed Victorian schoolhouse was the primary school attached to the nearby St Columb's Church of Ireland Cathedral. It ceased to function as a school in 1995 and has since fallen into disrepair. The new HLF funded project will see the building conserved and opened up to provide a venue for cultural and heritage tourism and will create training, education and employment opportunities.

The programme of capital works, in addition to returning the building to its former glory, will contribute to the regeneration of the area through the creation of almost 800sq/m of office, exhibition and community space which will house local social economy firms and private businesses. The Shoreditch Trust, an award winning London based charitable regeneration agency, has been secured as a tenant and will open a restaurant and training facility, providing up to 35 apprenticeships each year for local people interested in pursuing a career in the catering industry.

The HLF grant will also be used to support a programme of outreach and educational activities to enable the local community to become involved in learning about the history and heritage of the building. The 'Tales from School' project, which will run alongside the restoration works, will record the memories and experiences of past pupils, teachers and the local community on a range of themes including school days, lessons and teachers, childhood aspirations and life developments. An exhibition will be produced for permanent display in the completed building to highlight the impact the school has had on the lives of individuals and the wider local community.

This award brings HLF's investment in Northern Ireland's heritage to £126million. Since 1994, over 1000 awards have been made for local heritage projects including grants to support the conservation of the Playhouse, install the Armada exhibition at the Tower Museum and open up the hidden heritage of the Diamond War Memorial.

Commenting on the latest announcement, HLF Northern Ireland Committee member, Máire Gallagher, said: "We are delighted to be involved in this fantastic project which will bring back to life this historic building and return it to use for the benefit of the whole community. For 15 years HLF has been committed to promoting the value of heritage to modern life and this project clearly shows how our past can have the most beneficial impacts on our future by aiding regeneration, boosting the economy and providing opportunities for local people to engage with their heritage".

Margaret Lee, Chief Executive The Cresco Trust said that the restoration and refurbishment of this building to its former glory will be a great asset to the city. "We are delighted to receive this funding from the HLF. The old school is such a significant building within the City Walls and the restoration will provide a facility where local people can learn, engage and progress. It will remain very much part of the City's history," said Margaret.

Kriterion Conservation Architects based in the city have been appointed to carry out the restoration works. "The school is an attractive red brick building with sandstone dressings and retains many of its original internal features which will be sympathetically restored, respecting the building's history, layout and form," said Seamus McCloskey, Partner of Kriterion Conservation Architects.

With HLF funding secured, it is hoped that work to restore the building will start early next year.

Further information

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