Heritage Lottery Fund helps put the heart back into Renfrew

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A grant of almost £800,000 was announced today by the Heritage Lottery Fund for a contemporary restoration and development project to re-establish the striking Renfrew Town Hall as a hub for community life. The building will be transformed into a modern public hall and contemporary museum which will tell the story of the area's pioneering history in aviation.

With a spire rising 105 feet, Renfrew Town Hall was officially opened in 1873 as a fine example of mid-Victorian architecture and a source of great civic pride. Today, it is in a poor state of repair with no general access for the public and only used sporadically for functions.

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £798,600 will help see the building transformed into a modern public hall available for social and commercial hire, a new museum and exhibition space. The council will populate the foyer with a variety of services, with the objective of making it a regular destination for local people and visitors. Plans include an information point, tourist information, library access, public computer access, WiFi access and refreshments.

The new museum will mean that photographs and objects relating to the area's important role in the history of aviation can now displayed to the public. Renfrew was the first municipal airport in Scotland with flights beginning in 1912. The first aircraft to cross the Atlantic both ways was built nearby and Renfrew was the third busiest airport in Britain in 1948. Collections relating to other important local industries such as ship-building and boiler-making will also be displayed.

Commenting on the today's grant announcement, Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "As part of our new strategic plan, Renfrew is a development priority area for the Heritage Lottery Fund. We are working hard with lots of local people to make sure that they make the most of the heritage lottery grants available to them, so we are delighted to be able to help support such an important project as this.

"Renfrew Town Hall gives its community a heart, a symbol of history and identity that cannot be replaced. The Heritage Lottery Fund believes that breathing new life into it, it will not only re-establish it at the centre of community life but will also make a marked contribution to the economics of the area."

Renfrewshire Council Leader, Derek Mackay, said: "The award of this major funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund is great news for Renfrew and is further evidence that our efforts to secure the future of this iconic part of Renfrew's heritage are making significant progress.

"Our proposals for the refurbishment and extension of Renfrew Town Hall have widespread support in the community.

"We want to preserve the Town hall's outstanding architectural heritage while boosting access and enhancing its role as a focal point of the community. This significant funding award is another big boost towards achieving that aim. Our long term plan to completely revamp the building is still firmly on course."

The project focuses on Renfrew Town Hall, sited at Renfrew Cross, Renfrew. The town hall is an important Grade A listed building at the very heart of Renfrew and is a landmark building both physically and socially within the town.

Renfrewshire Council will restore the fabric and historic architecture of Renfrew Town Hall and provide physical and intellectual access to its heritage, ensuring its place at the heart of the local community.

The heritage architecture will be fully restored and the building made fit for the next generation. The project creates a new public space within the hall which will contain interpretation about the history of the hall and its role in Renfrew, and which offers a place to socialise, whilst enjoying the building's heritage.

The project will undertake the architectural restoration of the important elements of this historic building. Windows and stained glass, decorative doors, mouldings and external stonework will be refurbished or sympathetically replaced. The fabric of the building will be refurbished, including the recovering the existing roof and the replacement and repair of various timber rot to floors and walls. In addition to this the main hall gallery, which contains original seating, will be made safe and refurbished. The building’s services will be repaired and refurbished, including the strip out and replacement of the electrical, gas, heating and water installations.

The works also include the installation of a new lift to allow access to all levels. The fittings and décor will be upgraded throughout the existing building while recent, less appropriate architectural interventions will be removed. At the original front entrance a number of wooden room dividers will be removed with the stained glass panelling within this area will be retained and re-used.

A small 1950s extension of low architectural merit, which currently houses a kitchen and cloakroom, will be removed and replaced by a larger, architecturally exciting extension which will house a new museum. The museum will interpret the town’ story, and in particular its proud heritage as a major political and commercial centre. It is currently planned that the stone from which this is built, which is both attractive and sympathetically weathered, will be used in the new extension building works.

The proposals allow for the relocation the registrar’s suite into the upper half of the new extension. The result increases the ground floor circulation space, allows easier access and creates a bright and attractive ceremonial space.

This project will involve the downtaking of various structural elements and the installation of a new walkway at mezzanine level link with the stair tower to create a mezzanine balcony and a further walkway link at the conference level to the stair tower, allowing the whole building to become fully accessible. It is envisaged that these spaces will provide an impressive focal point within the public space at the front of the building through the installation of the new link walkways.

The project will replace the artificially-lit, cramped spaces at the front of the building with a new public foyer. The foyer will be accessed from a new level access entrance at the front doors. Through the use of new ramps and stairs, incorporating weathered stone from the demolished 1950s extension, the accessway will provide external seating and a more obvious announcement of the entrance to the building.

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Decorative floors of marble and terrazzo, currently unseen due to the cramped conditions, lack of light and restricted access will be brought back to life at the heart of this space.

In the foyer a new glass lift will provide access to all areas of the building, including, for the first time, to a conference room on the second floor which affords superb views east and west.

The project includes a new extension on the south elevation of the building of a bold and contemporary design which utilises planar glazing and natural sandstone on the external facade. At ground level the extension will house the new community museum, which will be accessed from the revised foyer.

A mezzanine floor, which extends over half the new extension, will house the registrar's marriage suite. Bright, spacious and contemporary, this room will be ideal for marriages. The space shall be top lit with subdued light emitting through the floor to ceiling glazing.

The main passageways running east-west will be widened, and their entranceways made more obvious. The existing toilet facilities throughout the building shall be removed and new toilets will be installed at ground / mezzanine level along with the installation of two new kitchen areas at ground and main hall level.

The rear doors will be retained as the access for functions, which retains the use of the impressive symmetrical stairways to the first floor and Main Hall.

Environmental sustainability is an important element of the planning of this project. Renfrew Town Hall contains the original sophisticated heating and ventilating system, which circulates air without the need for power. The refurbishment proposals will return this system to full working order, with the extra capital costs of additional fire-detection equipment offset by lower utility costs over the life of the building.

The repairs to the historic elements of the building, in particular windows, doors, roof and roof void will minimise energy waste whilst ensuring that sufficient ventilation exists to ensure that damp and mould are not encouraged.

The new build extension is part stone, which will be recycled from the existing extension where practicable, and part planar glazing, which allows for significant solar gain. The new museum extension will contain sensitive and delicate historic materials. To help retain these artefacts at their optimum state the works have allowed for the installation of environmental controllers to protect these historic objects.

Energy efficiency is designed to building regulation standards, including upgrading controls on heating systems and energy efficient equipment. The refurbishment replaces the toilets and kitchens, where any equipment installed will be sourced to try and better industry standards on energy efficiency and re-use.

Electrical fittings throughout will be upgraded for energy efficient equipment. The energy efficiency unit within Investment & Technical Services division will produce a detailed energy plan. In general the project's architects foresee compliance with the expectations as set out in the "planning greener heritage projects" guidance.

Throughout the refurbishment work Renfrewshire Council and the successful contractor will engage with local people through a variety of activities to interpret the regeneration process, the building and the on-going refurbishment work.

Further information

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