East End’s Three Mills site gets restoration ‘green light’ in time for Olympics

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A development grant of £248,000 has been awarded to help the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust progress their plans, which include restoring the mill, its neighbour Miller's House, and creating a self-sustaining and vibrant visitor centre around the history of this industrial gem in the heart of the Thames Gateway.

The restoration project, run in conjunction with the Waterways Trust, is expected to take 18 months to complete and forms part of a wider regeneration scheme for the Thames Gateway development area in line with the Olympics. To be run by the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust - staffed almost entirely by volunteers - the project demonstrates an excellent example of how heritage conservation can be married with new renewable energy production technologies to create a sustainable visitor attraction with wider community benefits. The Trust aims to incorporate hydro electricity production using the restored waterwheels and additional turbines, which will not only boost income at the site but also provide a key educational hook for learning about the milling process for visitors of all ages.

Dating back to 1776, House Mill is one of the most important historic buildings in East London surviving today and on English Heritage’s At Risk Register. It is also the largest remaining tidal mill in the world and the oldest mill on Three Mills Island. In medieval times the island – now a conservation area - was known as ‘Three Mills’ and provided flour to the local bakers of Stratford-atte-Bow who supplied bread to the City of London.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for London, said: “We’re extremely pleased to give initial support to the Restoring House Mill project. This very rare industrial treasure well deserves to be saved for future generations and transformed into a key heritage attraction for East London. We look forward to working with the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust and receiving their application for a full grant in the future."

The refurbished mill will create many volunteer opportunities and offer workshops teaching traditional skills such as metal work, carpentry and hand milling. There will be stronger links made with local schools with on-site drama and research activities offered, in addition to exciting training opportunities for adults from one-day courses through to placements through a partnership with The Building Crafts College.

For visitors, a year-round programme of events and activities will feature interactive displays grouped by theme into: The Place – investigating the landscape and surrounding waterways; The House Mill – the workings and restoration; The People – exploring Bow’s diverse community from the Huguenots to today; and The Products – comparing traditional products of the past and using renewable energies now.

John Haggerty, Chairman of the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust, said: “It has taken a long time to get here; we have had many disappoints over the years but now, thanks to HLF, we can progress this project with focused and positive energy to enable us to give the people of East London a heritage building they can be proud of; to give London another attraction and show the World its largest surviving tidal mill. And, demonstrate sustainability through hydro-power. It is a unique project in a unique building and we are very proud of it.”

Lyn Brown, MP for West Ham also offered her support for the project: “I would like to congratulate the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust on their successful initial application to the HLF. This is a very worthwhile project and I recognise the hard work and imagination of the volunteers who are dedicating their time to transforming this wonderful East London heritage asset into an attraction that can be enjoyed by all.”

Notes to editors

***A first-round pass means the project meets our 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, including £868million in London alone.

For more information about House Mill, Three Mills Island and the River Lea Tidal Mill Trust

The Waterways Trust is a national charity which works with others to promote greater public enjoyment of our inland waterways. www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk

Further information

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