Southam’s First World War Army Hut wins Heritage Lottery Fund support

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The project aims to restore the wooden army hut – believed to be the only surviving and accessible First World War billet hut in England in its original layout.

Development funding of £24,700 has been awarded by HLF to help the Heart of England Community Foundation, who will be carrying out the project, progress their plans to apply for a full grant of £249,900 at a later date.

Craven Lane Hall saw active service in Belgium before being flat-packed and shipped to Sutton Coldfield. In 1921 it was bought by Southam’s residents as a recreation hall for returning servicemen. Over the last 90 years it has been used for social clubs, group meetings, parties, the weekly popular mini-market, and even for wedding receptions. In the 1940s it was known as ‘the Infant Welfare Hut’ because children were weighed and inoculated there. In 2007 it was going to be demolished by a developer but with the help of a local secret benefactor the Heart of England Community Foundation was able to save it for the community.

Town people have been adamant that they want the Hall to be restored rather than replaced and were therefore delighted to learn, at a meeting on the 8 December, that HLF has offered its initial support.

The Foundation will use this to create a delivery plan and if HLF supports that too, then a full grant will follow and the fabric and reputation of this much-loved community centre will be safe for years to come.

Kate Mulkern, the Foundation’s Director, shared the good news with stunned locals. She said: “We are so grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Hall is amazingly well preserved, but is increasingly fragile and I don’t think it would survive much longer without sensitive and expert renovation. It is a vital part of Southam’s community life, and it also directly links us to the Great War.”

She urged anyone with stories or photographs of the Hall or of Southam during the First World War to get in touch with her on kate@heartofenglandcf.co.uk.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: “We are delighted to give our initial support for this worthwhile project which aims to restore a fascinating WWI structure and well loved local landmark and secure it for community use. We look forward to receiving a full application in the future.”

Notes to editors

The Heart of England Community Foundation was established in 1995 and manages funds for Coventry and Warwickshire’s philanthropists and companies including Orbit Heart of England Housing Association, PSA Peugeot Citroen, AXA, Rolls Royce, the Deeley Group, National Grid and Midland Heart. The charity awards over £1m a year to community projects. Case histories are available. It is one of 55 Community Foundations in the UK. Community Foundations are experts in revitalising local communities through effective charitable giving.

*A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project 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.

Further information

Please contact Kate Mulkern, Director, Heart of England Community Foundation on kate@heartofenglandcf.co.uk, or 024 7688 4386 or 07813 039 826. Website: www.heartofenglandcf.co.uk