Support for 'hidden' Victorian street

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Gateshead Council is the only local authority in the North East of England to secure initial support from the latest round of the HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) programme[2] which has awarded funding to improve the local shopping centre within the Coatsworth Road Conservation Area in Gateshead.

The work will include a number of major public realm improvements as well as the restoration of some of the area's many original Victorian shop fronts – many of which lie hidden behind more modern facades.

The five-year scheme will see a total investment of £1.9m into the Coatsworth Road Conservation Area in two tranches. A total of £1.4m will come from HLF if the Council secures the full grant at the second round of the application, and £480,000 partnership funding from Gateshead Council.

Councillor Linda Green, Cabinet member for Culture, says: "It's easy to associate the nation's heritage with ruined medieval castles and grand stately homes, but in many cases heritage is literally just around the corner – even if we don't always see it.

"We initially declared the area around Coatsworth Road a conservation area because of its unique character, but in time some of that character has become obscured by the modern world.

"Support from the Heritage Lottery Fund will allow us to restore some of the features which originally led us to declare it a Conservation Area, and to breathe new life into the whole area."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "The Heritage Lottery Fund is pleased to be giving initial support towards the revitalisation of Coatsworth Road. An accompanying development grant will help Gateshead Council to work up its plans for the project with the end game being the restoration of a number of historic buildings and shop fronts. Buy-in from the local community is important to us and so the idea of implementing a series of conservation training sessions is a particularly welcome feature of the scheme."

HLF's THI programme is designed to regenerate Conservation Areas that display particular social or economic need, encouraging partnerships with the local community and organisations to carry out repairs and other works to historic buildings, structures and spaces.

Coatsworth Road is one of seven THI schemes to be given initial HLF support this year and the only project in the North East of England.

The funding will not just be used for building works. Gateshead Council intends to use some of the funding to provide training courses on property conservation and retail and business skills for local shopkeepers to help them to improve their efficiency and profitability, conserve their premises and help to safeguard the area's viability. It's hoped that this training might also be extended to retailers in other areas.

Works are expected to begin in 2012 and will be completed by 2017.

Notes to editors

• [1] A THI earmarked first-round pass means that money has been set aside by the HLF for the scheme in question. Competition at this stage is tough, and while it does not guarantee funding, it is an indication of positive support. The applicants can then progress to the second round and submit a further, fully-developed application to secure the full award. This early level of strong financial commitment means that THIs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided their final proposals fully meet the programme criteria.

• [2] HLF's THI encourages partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces. Grants range from £500,000 to £2m. To date, HLF has invested over £200m regenerating towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline.

Further information

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