Town and city dwellers across Scotland to set up local ‘Time Teams’

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Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) has been awarded a first-round pass for funding of around £1.65million by the HLF for Scotland's Urban Past (SUP). This includes £55,000 of development funding to work up plans which will involve communities across Scotland in celebrating and recording their urban environment and heritage.

The second round application to deliver the full five-year project will be submitted in December 2013.

The project builds on the success of the Scotland’s Rural Past (SRP) community archaeology initiative. Running for five years, SRP inspired and trained hundreds of volunteers in 60 local groups the length and breadth of Scotland, to research and record their historic settlements and landscapes.

Now Scotland’s Urban Past (SUP) will focus on the urban built environment.

The five-year project will encourage 60 communities across Scotland to explore the rich architectural, social and personal histories of their urban environments, to understand their distinctive characters, and to study how they have changed over time.

All periods up to the present day will be investigated, although the emphasis is likely to be on the last two to three centuries, where there is a higher concentration of existing architecture, historical documentation and personal memories.

Speaking about the project, which has been developed in partnership with Historic Scotland, Rebecca Bailey, RCAHMS Head of Education and Outreach, said: “It is easy to overlook the fascinating histories of our urban environments as we go about our everyday lives. With this project, we are turning the spotlight on Scotland’s towns and cities, and involving the local communities themselves in telling stories that go back hundreds of years.

“Profound social, economic and technological changes have shaped our urban landscapes into the unique places that many of us occupy today. We want to make a direct connection between these places and the people that live in them. It is, quite literally, about exploring the history that is right on our own doorsteps.”

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, added: “Scotland’s Rural Past was an extremely successful project which inspired hundreds of people to get involved in their community’s heritage for the first time. HLF is delighted to give our initial support to a project which will build on that momentum, providing opportunities for people to learn new skills and enjoy new experiences while building a detailed history of Scotland’s towns and villages.”

SUP will:

- offer training courses in building investigation, photography, oral history recording and historical document research run by RCAHMS’ expert staff
- encourage participants to actively research, record and promote awareness of their urban past

- take information and personal memories gathered by participants into the RCAHMS Canmore website - the online database of Scotland's national collection of the built environment
- run events and hands-on activities to encourage people to get involved
- help people of all ages to learn about the urban past

The scale of each project will range from investigations of a building, street or neighbourhood, to an entire urban area. Some participants will be trained in conventional survey and recording techniques to make detailed investigations of the social, architectural and industrial heritage. Others may explore the personal histories of buildings and areas by gathering photographs, documents and oral histories from local residents. Creative projects involving local artists will form an important part of SUP, particularly for new audiences and young people.

'Crowd-sourcing' activities will connect the wider public with their urban heritage and a mobile website will enable people to upload information and access detailed architectural notes via mobile devices.

Notes to editors

RCAHMS is the national collection of materials on Scotland's built environment that connects people to places across time. It is the first port of call for information about the built environment of Scotland, from prehistory to the present and records the changing landscape of Scotland and collects materials relating to it.

The impetus for Scotland's Urban Past (SUP) stems from success of the HLF-supported Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project. Evaluation emphasised the positive impact SRP had on individuals and communities across Scotland. Skills and experience gained through participation created a strong legacy, with many community projects developing further and spawning new ideas after SRP was completed. Information gathered by participants has enriched the national database, and project outputs have inspired wider understanding and awareness of the rural heritage.

SUP aims to support 60 community projects in 20 urban areas over a five year period. The target audiences would be 33% existing heritage / local history groups, 33% 'new' audiences, and 33% young people. The project would be delivered by a team of seven staff, recruited for the five year duration of the project.

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

Further information

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