

The grant will pay for essential structural building work to ensure the survival of the Watch House and the museum for many years to come.

Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade was founded in 1864 and was the first in the country to provide sea rescue facilities on a voluntary basis and was a model for other Life Brigades throughout Great Britain.

This year the TVLB commemorates its 150th anniversary with many exciting activities that will encourage more visitors to the distinctive Grade II listed building looking out over the entrance to the Tyne and remind the local community of the exceptional work the TVLB do.

The project, together with the funding from the HLF, will help to raise the brigade's profile, enhance its visitor experience in the museum and expand its volunteer base, community events and outreach work, including accommodating an increase in school visits.

North Tyneside Council has been working closely with the organisation and has committed £100,000 towards the restoration of the Watch House, which has been on the site since 1887. The brigade itself has raised more than £50,000 through fundraising and voluntary contributions to go towards the restoration project.

North Tyneside elected Mayor, Norma Redfearn, is a keen supporter of the brigade and the indispensable service it carries out in unpaid rescue work along the coastline.

She said: “I am absolutely delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded this grant to preserve the building, make it more accessible to the community and help attract more people to join the Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade. The Watch House and its museum is a very special building and form an integral part of the story of North Tyneside's rich maritime heritage. It remains the very heart and soul of the Brigade and its restoration is essential. It commemorates the achievements of the past, serves as today's headquarters and is home to the largest collection of shipwreck and rescue artefacts as well as housing a fascinating collection of photographs from the earliest years to today.”

Peter Lilley, Captain and Press Officer, Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade, added: "The Members and Directors of the Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade wish to place on record their thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the award they have given us which will lead to the restoration of our Watch House Museum. Achieving this award has only been possible due to the substantial and superb support we have received from North Tyneside Council who have worked with a small group of our members to secure these vital funds.

“It was nearly 20 years ago that the brigade first started to look at ways of restoring the building and there have been many ups and downs along the way to achieving this grant. However, as we continue to commemorate and celebrate our 150th anniversary, we are all overjoyed at the prospect that our ‘home’ will receive the care and attention it needs to ensure the building remains in use for many years to come and to allow us to greatly enhance the visitor experience we can offer.”

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “This year marks the 150th anniversary of Tynemouth’s Volunteer Life Brigade making this project especially timely. HLF’s funding will restore the historic Watch House and secure its long-term future through a series of vital restoration works and by dramatically improving public access which, in turn, will bring the fascinating stories of the Life Brigade, and its considerable impact on the people of Tynemouth, to life for visitors for many years to come. North Tyneside is an important development area for us at HLF and we are working hard to encourage more applications from this area so we’re particularly pleased to see this project happening.”

Notes to editors

North Tyneside has received less funding from HLF over the last 10 years and as a result is a priority area for HLF. Working in partnership with North Tyneside Council and VODA we are currently looking at new ways to promote heritage and encourage more applications.

If you have ideas for projects or simply want to find out more about our grant programmes please get in touch.

Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade

The Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade’s Watch House Museum, originally built to serve as a headquarters and look-out station for the rescue team, houses a unique collection of many interesting objects associated with shipwrecks and lifesaving.

Its collection includes items from the ‘Stanley’, a passenger steamer that was wrecked on the Black Middens Rocks on 24 November 1864 and whose loss led to the formation of the Brigade 11 days later, to one-off designs off Breeches Buoy Equipment which the brigade was sent to test and evaluate but were never sent into operational service. The museum serves as an important reminder of the dangers and risks associated with our beautiful coastline, and each year the TVLB welcomes visitors from far and wide into the building to share our famous stories and demonstrate the equipment used in by-gone times.

The Watch House is also still used by the Rescue Team as their headquarters with training taking place at least one a week and the meeting rooms are used by the brigade’s committee and many other organisations on a regular basis. The brigade relies totally on voluntary donations, support from various trust funds and contributions in kind from local firms and businesses. The brigade also stages a variety of major annual fundraising events and smaller individual collections.