Take-off for wartime aviation project

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A Suffolk-based social enterprise, New Heritage Solutions CIC, has been awarded a grant of £575,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to lead a three year programme of archaeology, oral history and museum development which will keep alive the momentous story of what's become known as the 'friendly invasion' of the Second World War.

Nearly 70 airfields, with between 3,000 and 4,000 people living on each, were built from Northamptonshire to the North Sea coast in a matter of months after America entered the war in December 1941. Working with volunteers of all ages the Eighth in the East will focus on people not planes to record the impact the arrival of the US 8th Air Force had on local lives and the landscape of the East of England.

The project will actively seek contributions to a region-wide programme of research, interpretation and celebration focusing on the remains of sites, buildings, archives and objects found near airfields and crash sites across East Anglia, Bedfordshire, and Hertfordshire. Working with local museum partners the people will record memories, upload photographs, join archaeological exercises, learn to run museums and take part in a series of community events and other themed activities.

Project Leader Nick Patrick said: "This may feel like a familiar history but in truth it's becoming a forgotten one. The airfields that once dotted the countryside are slowly disappearing and so too are the devoted enthusiasts who have kept this history alive. This grant will help to secure their legacy and help future generations engage with it."

Ivan Cutting, Eighth in the East Creative Director, said: "The ambition of the project partners is to deliver new skills through project activities. This past is part and parcel of the East of England's identity. We want to bring young and old together to help us record and re-tell this story. We want to encourage the next generation of archaeologists, museum curators, photographers, film-makers and creative writers. We want to develop resources that can benefit people's education as well as the region's economy."

Maggie Appleton, Committee Member for the Heritage Lottery Fund East of England said: "We are delighted to see this project get off the ground. The heritage of the airfields in the East of England and the way they have shaped the landscape and people's identities is so important. The scale of the operation during WWII was enormous, with over 200,000 serving men and women occupying 60 airfields across the East of England and their story will now be told, giving people of all ages a fantastic opportunity to get involved and learn new skills in the process."

Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal, said: "It is great news that the Eighth in the East project has been awarded £575,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is important we recognise our history and by documenting the impact the US 8th Air Force had on our part of the country during WW2 we can preserve that for future generations."

Notes to editors

About the Eighth in the East
The Eighth in the East is a partnership lead by New Heritage Solutions Community Interest Company based in

Halesworth, Suffolk. The partners are: University of East Anglia, Norfolk Historic Environment Services, Norfolk Record Office, the Second Air Division Memorial Library and Eastern Angles Theatre Company. The project is formally supported by Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, the Airfield Research Group and South Norfolk District Council.

Horsham St Faith
Originally an RAF base, Horsham St Faith (now Norwich International Airport) was home to the 56th Fighter Group from April to July 1943, and the 458th Bomb Group from January 1944 to June 1945.

Further information

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