Whitehaven's townscape set for Heritage Lottery Fund makeover

22/11/2012

The bid for a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) scheme is being pulled together by Copeland Borough Council and a range of partners who have their sights on a £1.36million pot of funds, most of which will be handed over as grants to building owners over the next five years.

Copeland is the only local authority in Cumbria to secure initial support from the latest round of HLF's THI programme, which is designed to help regenerate conservation areas that are struggling with social or economic decline. In the current economic climate we understand that this is a difficult time for people to invest in their properties and the Council itself has to make substantial savings which may impact on the area.

However, if the bid is successful, targeted historic buildings in an area centred on Market Place, James Street and parts of Irish Street and Howgill Street will be repaired and restored, and empty floors brought back into use. To qualify for a grant, property owners will put some of their own funds towards the works, raising the total invested to well over £2million.

The Council has already met with many property owners in the area, getting very positive feedback. Russell Norman from the Howgill Centre and partner in the Whitehaven Foyer project, said: "As a partner with an historic building in the area, the former YMCA site, the opportunity to restore the building in keeping with its history and place in the community is an extremely exciting proposition."

Charles Maudling, Chairman of Whitehaven Chamber of Trade, who is one of a range of partners supporting the bid, said: "Getting this Lottery cash should provide a real boost for owners and traders at a time when businesses are under pressure from all sides. If we can improve the look and feel of the area it will make it a better place to shop and to run a business."

Councillor Mike McVeigh, who is championing the bid, said: "I am particularly pleased that the Heritage Lottery Fund is keen to invest in this part of the Whitehaven Conservation Area. This is where the commercial core of the town was born and it will be great to see the place improved. I'm also delighted funds will be spent on activities to involve local people and schoolchildren in their heritage, and provide training opportunities. It's a great scheme for a whole host of reasons."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "This is an extremely exciting project driven by local residents. It demonstrates how our heritage can be a living part of a community bringing people together to learn from and enjoy their shared identity. We are delighted to be giving this very worthwhile venture our full support."

Over the next few months, local people will be able to show their support for the bid through a range of activities. The most exciting will be a heritage skills fair, where people will be able to try their hand at traditional building skills such as lime pointing and stonework repair. There will also be a training day for local builders, and an event to get school children interested in careers in heritage conservation.

Regional charity North of England Civic Trust is helping the council to prepare the bid. Graham Bell, director, said: “There is a strong chance the bid will be successful but we do need to show that local people are behind it. It would be great if people could get in touch with ideas on how we can breathe new life into these historic shopping streets.”

A display of information on the THI will shortly be set up in one of the shops on Market Place, where it will stay until the bid goes in next March. If successful, funds will be available from the end of 2013 until 2018.