Historic Widnes church saved thanks to new community role

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St Marie's Roman Catholic Church, Widnes, was designed in the early 1860's by EW Pugin and, since being closed in 2007, has fallen into serious disrepair suffering frequent attacks by vandals.

The Grade II listed church is considered one of the ten most endangered heritage buildings in Britain by the Victorian Society but now its future is assured once it has been restored for use as a community centre run by Halton and St Helens Voluntary and Community Action.

Pugin designed a large number of Catholic churches and cathedrals in Britain and Ireland and St Marie's one of the most complete examples of his work with many original architectural features still intact. It is described by the Victorian Society as being of national importance.

The project involves a complete repair of the structure which will then act as the operational base for Halton and St Helens VCA's work with the community. The restoration will include a wide-ranging volunteer programme so that local people can learn more about the building's heritage as a centre of community life throughout the Victorian era and subsequently.

The building of the church in 1864 was originally funded by the local community it went on to serve for 150 years. Its congregation also grew significantly as a result of Irish and Eastern European immigration into Liverpool.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West England, said: "We are really pleased to be able to support this project that gives a new lease of life to an historic building that has served the local community through more than one and a half centuries and will now be able to continue, albeit in a new role, into the future."

For Halton and St Helen's VCA, Chief Executive Sally Yeoman, said: "We will now begin the work of breathing new life into this beautiful old building and we hope that by the New Year of 2014, we'll be in position to open the doors on a magnificent heritage centre which will make the local community proud."

Further information

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