York Castle Museum project wins Heritage Lottery Fund support

24/11/2011

The Trust have applied to HLF for a £1.3million grant to help transform the upper levels of the Debtors' Prison area of the museum, including a major exhibition to mark the centenary of the First World War.

Development funding of £73,000 has also been awarded to help progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

If successful, the Trust will use the money to create 1914 - When the World Changed Forever, a five-year blockbuster exhibition which will change and refresh to mark centenaries between 2014 and 2018. It will take place in a newly created exhibition space on the first floor of the museum. A lift will be installed allowing disabled access to the floor for the first time and more space will be opened up – with all office space moved to the second floor.

The work will be one of the largest learning projects ever to take place in York. It will create 500 volunteering opportunities and involve hundreds of people from across York and the region in developing and delivering the exhibition, activities and gallery spaces.

Janet Barnes, chief executive of York Museums Trust, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us the backing we need to develop this project. It is fantastic to have their support in helping us to achieve our ambitious plans for York Castle Museum which we hope will see thousands of extra visitors to the museum by 2018. The proposed changes will be unveiled in time to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the Great War. No other war has ever had such a significant impact on nearly every aspect of life in Britain. This exhibition will look at the key political moments and the battles but also how culture and society's values were revolutionised in this period."

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for Yorkshire and the Humber, said: "This project aims to not only make more accessible a fascinating building – the oldest debtors prison in the country – but also bring alive the stories of the First World War to new audiences. HLF is pleased to give initial support to this worthwhile project."

The remaining funds for the proposals would come through York Museums Trust's and other national development funds and by applying to other charitable trusts and private sponsorship. The Trust will hear whether they have been successful in the second round of their HLF bid in January 2013. If it is, work will commence immediately with the upper two floors of the Debtors' side of the prison (the one next to York Crown Court) being closed to the public for 12 months. The ground floor exhibitions, that include the York Castle Prison experience and The Sixties will remain open for most of the year but will be closed at certain times.

The new proposals would significantly change the current layout of the museum, with the second floor being partly used for office space and partly for eight new learning, activity and archive rooms, This would enable all of the first floor to be used as exhibition space, providing a stage for producing large scale exhibitions that tell some of the most important national and international stories that changed the world, using local and regional perspectives, collections and archives. The first of these would be 1914 – When the World Changed Forever.

The exhibition, which will draw from the fine art collections of York Art Gallery as well the social history collections of York Castle Museum, would be complemented by city-wide programme of events and activities.

The proposed lift would allow disabled access to all floors of the Debtors' prison for the first time. The funds would also be used to provide the necessary environmental conditions specified for an exhibition space as well as the visitor facilities and equipment needed in the new spaces.
The Trust has drawn up the plans after consultation with visitors, both in person and in an online survey. The Great War was the most popular theme for an exhibition, with disabled access another area highlighted in the consultation.

Further information
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Notes to editors

York Castle Museum
Admission: Adult - £8.50, Child - Free, Under 5s – Free, Concessions £7.50, York Card – Free.
Children go free with one paying adult. Offer does not apply to organised groups.
York Castle Museum
www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk