Homes for Heroes pub set for £3.8million Lottery



The Lower Hall at The Fellowship Inn, Bellingham

A semi-derelict south London pub built for First World War veterans and their families is set to be restored to a thriving community venue thanks to a multi-million pound grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

[quote/]The Fellowship Inn will house Lewisham's only cinema[/quote]

Social landlord Phoenix Community Housing has been awarded £3.8million to develop a wide range of new facilities at The Fellowship Inn in Bellingham, Lewisham, including the only cinema for the borough and a new live events venue.

The project will secure the future of the community pub while creating more than 70 jobs and many more training and volunteering opportunities.

The Fellowship was built in the 1920s as the first ever pub on a London UK housing estate. It was part of a ‘Homes for Heroes’ development to ease inner city overcrowding following the First World War, and used by the returning soldiers and their families for clubs, social activities and gatherings.

Later the pub acted as a training base and home for the heavyweight boxer Henry Cooper ahead of his 1963 fight with Cassius Clay, and its large theatre was graced by bands including Fleetwood Mac and John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers.

Since the 1980s the Fellowship Inn has fallen into serious disrepair, while Bellingham is today one of the most deprived areas in the UK with 40 per cent of children living in poverty.

The newly developed pub will include a:

- cinema
- live music venue
- café
- microbrewery
- bakery
- artists' studios

Phoenix, which owns and manages 6,300 homes in south Lewisham, will be carefully restoring the main bar area as part of the project.

The new scheme is expected to create 72 new jobs and apprenticeships along with more than 200 volunteering and training opportunities in an area where 12% of 16 to 24-year-olds are in receipt of workless benefits. Phoenix hopes the scheme will lead to increased investment in the area through additional visitor numbers and act as a driver for further regeneration.

This money has been awarded through HLF's Heritage Enterprise programme. It is designed to help when the cost of repairing an historic building is so high that restoration simply is not commercially viable. Grants of £100k to £5million bridge the financial gap, funding the vital repairs and conservation work needed to convert derelict, vacant buildings like The Fellowship Inn, into new, usable commercial spaces that can have a positive impact on local economies.

Sue Bowers, Head of HLF London, said: "It's innovative and commercially-focused projects just like The Fellowship Inn, for which the Heritage Lottery Fund created Heritage Enterprise. Once at the heart of a thriving community for heroes, this vital funding will give this beleaguered building the financial leg-up it needs not only to return it to use but to enable it to be the driving force behind the rejuvenation of Bellingham."

Chief Executive of Phoenix Community Housing, Jim Ripley, said: "Over the past few decades pub after pub in our area has closed its doors. That reflects the general trend in our area over many years – lack of investment, lower than average educational attainment and high unemployment.

"The Fellowship was created as part of a 'Homes for Heroes' cottage estate development for First World War veterans. We want to turn around the fortunes of our community and restore that sense of pride from almost 100 years ago.

"We're delighted that we've been successful in our bid for almost £4million Lottery funding. We would like to thank the Heritage Lottery for believing in our community and recognising the hugely important role that pubs play in British culture.

"We look forward to building on the heritage of a fantastic building and creating a venue that will create new opportunities for hundreds of our residents and really put Bellingham back on the map."

The Fellowship Inn was originally part of London County Council's Bellingham Estate. Previously London County Council had been reluctant to allow pubs on its estates due to pressure from the temperance movement, and plans for the Fellowship were raised in Parliament during a debate on prohibition.

In 1963 the American magazine *Sports Illustrated* reported on Henry Cooper before his fight with Cassius Clay, who later became known as Muhammad Ali: “For weeks he had lived at the Fellowship, taking his meals there, training in the back room when a wedding reception or tea party did not interfere.”

It reported that ahead of the fight: “The menfolk [at the Fellowship Inn] munched pork pies and lifted their nightly pints of lukewarm bitter in salute to the doggerel posted over the bar by one of the regulars. It made the point that Humble Henry would soundly thrash Gaseous Cassius ‘and once again prove that very old adage: Action speaks louder than strong verbal cabbage!’”

The building was Grade II listed by English Heritage in 2013, as a “remarkably complete example of an inter-war public house”.

Notes for editors

Phoenix
Phoenix was established in 2007. It is London’s first Community Gateway housing association, offering shareholding membership to residents and placing them at the heart of decision-making, and was ranked the 3rd best landlord in the UK for 2014 by 24housing magazine. Phoenix owns and manages more than 6,200 homes in the Bellingham, Downham and Whitefoot areas of south Lewisham.

The Fellowship Inn is the second pub acquired by Phoenix as part of its efforts to regenerate the Bellingham, Downham and Whitefoot wards of south Lewisham.

Last year it opened a new community building on the site of a pub that had been derelict for almost a decade. The Green Man now provides a wide range of facilities, including a training kitchen, café and credit union branch, along with headquarters for Phoenix’s 150 staff. The project was named best Community Achievement at the national 24Housing Awards 2014.

Further information

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