£2.4million of Lottery money to transform



CGI image of Sunderland Old Fire Station

The Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust is celebrating after the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) agreed to support the redevelopment of the Old Fire Station in High Street West.

The station was built in 1907, but has stood empty since 1992. It will now be brought back to life as a hub for cultural activity. It will host dance and drama studios, a heritage centre and a bar and restaurant.

It is hoped the restored building will provide a major boost for the local economy – providing jobs and increasing the spend in this part of the city. The increased activity in the area will help support local shops and businesses, while it is also hoped the venue will attract and retain more visitors to Wearside.

The Fire Station is the second stage of the Trust's ambitious plans to create a £10million culture quarter in the centre of Sunderland that will re-establish the area's previous importance as the Edwardian heart and soul of Sunderland.

"The first phase was the purchase of the Dun Cow," explained Paul Callaghan, of the MAC Trust. "The pub has been magnificently restored and the Fire Station will be treated in a similar way, respecting its iconic architecture and bringing back it back to a sustainable use."

John Mowbray, Chairman of the MAC Trust, added: “The bid and the project, which has been expertly managed by Buckley Burnett, has had widespread support and a Twitter campaign was particularly effective in demonstrating how much the building was loved and why people wanted it brought back into use.

“Sunderland City Council, who see the MACQ as an important part of Sunderland’s inner city regeneration, have also been very strong supporters of the proposal.”

The 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 restoration it is not commercially viable. Grants of £100,000 to £5m bridge the financial gap, funding the repairs and conservation work needed to convert derelict, vacant buildings like the Old Fire Station, into new, usable commercial spaces that can have a positive impact on local economies.

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “It’s our historic buildings that give our towns and cities distinctiveness and the Old Fire Station is central to the identity of Sunderland. This HLF grant will not only help secure its future but will give the building a new lease of life and provide the area with a much-needed economic boost.”

Paul Watson, Leader of Sunderland City Council, was delighted at the announcement: “The City Council and many others are investing in our city centre and this is another vote of confidence in its future.

“This successful bid showcased the strengths of being so close to the Empire Theatre and all opportunities that are coming on stream in and around the new Keel Square, and across the city centre.

“Its success shows how our city's reputation for hosting great events is recognised and, in looking to the future, it shows how our potential has also been recognised.

“This is very pleasing news for everyone in our city.”

Richard Buckley, of project managers Buckley Burnett, added: “Buckley Burnett are very pleased to be project directors of such a place-changing initiative. This has been the first non- listed building to be approved through this programme, so it is with great pride we look forward to delivering an exciting new venue and area for Sunderland.”

The development, which will cost about £3m, will go through further development stages but it is hoped that it will open in 2016. The total grant from HLF is £2,415,600, and a development grant of £220,000 has already been awarded.

The remaining original features will be incorporated into the new venue. The ground floor will be transformed into a restaurant which will open out on to the square outside. The first floor will house a sprung-floored dance studio run in conjunction with the people behind the successful Dance City studios.

Meanwhile, Live Theatre will create theatre space in the first floor’s back room, which once housed the firemen’s dormitories.

As part of the plans, a third floor will house a digital heritage centre, using 21st-century technology to remember past centuries. A new pitched roof is also in the pipeline.

The Dun Cow and Old Fire Station are the first two phases of the trust’s ambitions for the area. Ultimately, it’s hoped the project will incorporate buildings around the fire station to create the MacQ, Music, Arts and Cultural Quarter.

Further information

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