Transformation of Wardown Park Museum gains



Wardown Park Museum is set to be transformed

The major grant, made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, brings the museum just £200,000 away from its £3.5m target to fully restore and conserve the museum. The project is being led in partnership by Luton Culture and Luton Borough Council.

Originally designed in 1872 as a private residence for Frank Scargill, a local solicitor, the house was bought by two local councillors in 1903 who opened up the grounds as a public park. The house was used as a military hospital during the First World War before becoming a museum in 1931.

The project will see new areas of the building opened up and the ground floor improved and furnished to give visitors an insight into a wealthy family home during the Victorian period – including the Billiard Room, Smoking Room, Library and kitchen whilst also telling the story of Luton's transformation to the exciting and diverse town it is today. Volunteer Museum Makers will work with staff to create costumed tours, talks and special events to bring the story to life.

Using collections from the Luton new Archive, the hat industry and straw work to natural history and the Luton Voices archive, the displays will chart the development of Luton and celebrate its diverse communities.

A brand-new café will be created with access to the park, the Morning Room will become a new art gallery as well as venue for weddings and exhibitions and extensive work will make the building fully accessible. This will ensure the building can be a key part of community life and a fantastic attraction for visitors.

The project also aims to inspire future generations to take an active interest in Luton's heritage. A strengthened learning programme will train staff and volunteers and reach out to schools. As well as working with primary and secondary schools, the museum will offer students at the University of Bedfordshire the chance to take part in developing a digital gaming app to enhance access to the collection and its stories.

The next stage of the project will finalise the plans for the museum and will require it to close for redevelopment works, which are expected to start around April 2016 and be completed in the autumn.

Karen Perkins, Director of Arts and Museums, Luton Culture, said: "It is fantastic to receive the grant and have the backing of Heritage Lottery Fund for the proposed redevelopment plans for Wardown Park Museum. We would also like to thank Luton Borough Council, Garfield Weston Foundation and the DCMS Wolfson Foundation and many other funders; plus over 1,000 Museum Makers from the local community, for their help in forming the plans for the redevelopment and raising funds. We are £200k off our target of £3.5M and would welcome support to enable the full restoration of the listed building and conservation of Luton's historical collections. You can support the project or get involved at the Museum Makers website."

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: "We're delighted to support this project which, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, will transform Wardown Park Museum into a wonderful heritage attraction for Luton. The town is one of the areas in the East of England where we are especially keen to encourage more applications for heritage projects, and the museum's displays alone demonstrate just how special and diverse Luton's history is – and there are plenty of stories still left to tell!"

In welcoming the news of the Heritage Lottery Fund £1.8m grant for Wardown Park Museum, Luton South MP, Gavin Shuker said: "This is fantastic news for the museum, Wardown Park and for Luton. This is a very exciting project to return the building to the Victorian family home that it was together with brand-new visitor facilities. I would like to thank all the partners for their joint working on this project. This is a building that is very close to my heart as my great-grandmother was in service to the family that once lived in the mansion and my grandmother was born in the house. I hope this project will result in a museum that will create a fascinating attraction for people of all ages and cultures across the town."

On hearing about the grant, Cllr Hazel Simonds said: "I am absolutely delighted that HLF have supported the bid for the refurbishment of Wardown House. This investment will be a massive positive step in preserving this iconic building, which is such a key part of the town's heritage and history. It is so important that Wardown House remains open for future generations to visit and enjoy."

During their recent visit to the Museum Labour Cllrs Andrew Malcolm and Aysegul Gurbuz agreed: "We are delighted that this exciting project is going ahead. It will provide a great opportunity for Luton's community to come together to share their own stories."

There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in shaping the future of the museum. Re-Created, Wardown Park Museum's young people's forum, which has been involved since the early planning stages, said: "We're really excited about the redevelopment and the chance to get a youth voice into the museum and really put a creative stamp on it. The development will put a new spin on the museum and will provide more opportunities for people to engage. It is a

very positive thing happening in Luton for the area and the community and it’s great to be a part of it."

Notes to editors

About Luton Culture

Luton Culture is charitable trust with a focus on heritage, arts, community development and learning. The Trust provides communities and its visitors with inspiring, educational and enjoyable cultural experiences. It does this by animating and managing cultural venues which include museums, theatres, arts centre, gardens, libraries and community centres.

About Museum Makers

Initiated by Luton Culture, Museum Makers is a group of volunteers that work together with Luton Culture to develop, transform and run Wardown Park Museum. The group have so far delivered well attended activities and exhibitions, increasing the number of visitors and audiences engaging with Wardown Park Museum, such as the Wardown Winterland in the Christmas period, and Music in the Museum every first Sunday of the month. The group have also created Luton’s very own Happy video, which has increased the town’s profile and pride.

Further information

For more information and interviews please contact Luton Culture’s Director of Arts and Museums, Karen Perkins on karen.perkins@lutonculture.com or call 01582 546 726.