Businesses ready to dive in as former swimming



The exterior of Ashton Old Baths Place First / James Maddox

A derelict Victorian swimming baths in Tameside, Greater Manchester has been transformed and is now ready to open as a thriving hub for creative businesses, thanks to a grant from HLF's Heritage Enterprise programme.

Ashton Old Baths is the first Heritage Enterprise project in England to open since we launched the programme in 2013 with the aim of giving neglected historic buildings viable and productive new uses.

A freestanding wooden structure has been built within the main pool hall, creating space for 6,500 square feet of offices, meeting rooms and other facilities. These will be available to let for digital, creative and media business start-ups, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

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It's a new chapter for the Grade II* listed baths that were built in 1870 to improve the living conditions of the working classes. They served the Ashton community until they closed in the 1970s and since then, the baths have remained largely derelict and on English Heritage's *Heritage at Risk* register.

Projects to restore the baths couldn’t get off the ground because the value of the building was so low and the cost of work so high that it wasn’t commercially viable. HLF stepped in with a £1.7million grant to fund this ‘conservation deficit’ so that the building could play an active role in regenerating the local area.

People will have the chance to see the newly restored baths for the first time at an event on Saturday 19 March. Reigniting the public excitement that greeted the first opening of the building 146 years ago, up to 3,000 people are expected to attend the 'New Beginnings' event which is taking place in the square outside the building.

Sara Hilton, Head of HLF North West, said: “The project at Ashton Old Baths has managed to retain the essence of what makes being inside historic buildings so special whilst equipping it to meet the needs of the many new businesses who will now call it home. It’s a fitting example to be the first of many Heritage Enterprise projects to open in England and we are very proud to have supported it with National Lottery players’ money.”