New Life for Old College!

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More than £10m has been earmarked for a major restoration of Aberystwyth University's iconic Old College, the birthplace of university education in Wales.

The Grade I listed Old College is synonymous with Welsh nation-building following its purchase by the University of Wales for just £10,000 in 1867 using money donated by the local community.

After first opening its doors to students in 1872, for almost a century the Gothic seafront building saw thousands of students come and go, before focus shifted in the 1960s when the university moved to a newly built campus.

Saved by the people a second time

Now, funds generated by National Lottery players will see this much-loved building reclaim its place at the heart of Aberystwyth and the local community. Aberystwyth University has initially been granted development funding of £849,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans and ultimately unlock the full £10,581,800.*

John Glen MP, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, visited Aberystwyth today to make the announcement: "Aberystwyth Old College is a treasured local building that is recognised as one of the UK's most significant pieces of Gothic revival architecture.

"This fantastic scheme is so much more than a restoration project. Thanks to the £10.5m contribution from National Lottery Players, it will create a thriving visitor and learning destination that will provide new cultural and community resources for Aberystwyth and West Wales and boost the wider Welsh economy."

Baroness Kay Andrews, UK trustee and chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Wales, said: "These exciting plans to breathe new life into one of Wales's best loved historic buildings provide a significant and timely boost for the culture and economy of Aberystwyth and well beyond.

"Like many Aberystwyth graduates, I have fond memories of Old College. Now, for the first time, this unique building – the signature of Aberystwyth – will be open for the whole community to enjoy and profit from, including visitors to West Wales. This is great news for Aberystwyth and for Wales as a whole."

Blending old and new

Aiming to complete Old College's transformation in time for the university's 150th anniversary in 2022, work is now underway to develop plans for the building as a performance and gallery space for artists, exhibitions and musicians, a centre for entrepreneurs and new businesses, as well as café and community rooms. It will also house a university museum, allowing some of the 20,000 items normally in storage to be shown the light of day and a new science centre will showcase cutting edge interactive displays alongside a planetarium and 4D facility, highlighting the university's links with the European Space Agency.

Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University, added: “Old College has played a starring role in the provision of higher education in Wales and the wider world. Built with the legendary pennies of the people, it seems fitting now that funding from National Lottery players is playing a vital role in regenerating the building and the economy of this beautiful part of Wales. Our hope now is that Old College will become a showcase for the excellent research, teaching and treasures of Aberystwyth University, while providing vibrant new facilities for visitors and the local community who are key partners in this venture.”

As well as creating new jobs, apprenticeships, work placements, training and volunteer opportunities, the revitalised Old College will also encourage graduates from the university to stay within the town and establish new businesses.

Local resident and National Lottery player, Kathleen Gasela, said: “I’ve played the National Lottery for years and like everybody else enjoy imagining how I would spend the money if I won the jackpot. I’m sorry to say I haven’t become a millionaire yet, but nevertheless I am very happy to see the money being spent on worthwhile projects like this that will make real changes for what is offered within our community and make our wonderful seaside town an even better place to be!”

The total cost of the redevelopment is estimated to be around £22m, with the university planning other sources of financing for the project including a major fundraising appeal.

UK Government in Wales Minister Guto Bebb said: “This National Lottery funding secures the future of the Old College, meaning it can continue to play a vital role ln the future not only of the university but the town itself. As an alumnus myself, I am pleased to see such a worthwhile and exciting project as this being supported to help secure a sustainable future for a building of which I have very fond memories.”

Ben Lake, Member of Parliament for Ceredigion, added: “This is great news for Ceredigion and will reveal the hidden history of an iconic landmark as well as paving the way for its future. The Old College will once again be recognised as a beacon of culture and creativity, and a major catalyst for economic and social regeneration.”

Elin Jones, Assembly Member for Ceredigion, added: “For local people, the Old College will become a source of skills and job creation, inspiration, learning and entertainment. For visitors, it will be a new Welsh heritage destination with international appeal. The Old College will bring in diverse audiences to enjoy its unrivalled position on Aberystwyth’s seafront and its remarkable history as the epicentre of Welsh learning.”

Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Chair of the Old College Project Board, added: “Aberystwyth University is grateful to all those who have contributed to our plans and our success in securing this initial funding from the HLF. We will continue to develop plans in partnership with the community and our aim is to keep Old College open for as much as possible during the transformation, programing exhibitions and activities to help us test and develop our plans with our community, students and project partners.”

Notes to editors

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About Old College

Old College is one of Wales's most remarkable buildings. Home of Wales's first University, this rare Grade I listed building is of national significance, synonymous with Welsh nation-building and on a prominent site on Aberystwyth's promenade.

Aberystwyth University's ambition is to open up and reveal the hidden and inaccessible heritage of Old College and transform the building into a welcoming and vibrant cultural and creative centre for the community and a major catalyst for economic and social regeneration. For local people, Old College will be a source of skills and job creation, inspiration, learning and entertainment. For visitors, it will be a new Welsh heritage destination with international appeal.

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