



STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 HOURS ON TUESDAY 10th FEBRUARY 2015

Wisbech in line for £2 million restoration boost

High Street project wins initial backing from Heritage Lottery Fund

Fenland District Council has received initial support¹ from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a £2 million Townscape Heritage bid² for the Wisbech High Street project, it was announced today.

The project aims to deliver the restoration of a number of buildings and facades on Wisbech High Street and turn the former Cook's Butchers site into an exciting new area of public space.

Development funding of around £108,000 is included in the initial award to help the council progress its plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

The first-round pass from the HLF is the culmination of a years hard work led by Fenland District Council alongside the Wisbech Society, Wisbech Town Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, and more than 20 local stakeholders, overseen by consultants Ingham Pinnock Associates. In addition, a high level of support has been provided by staff at English Heritage, which is also represented on the project team.

The HLF's announcement is a significant achievement for the team behind the bid. The competition for this round of Townscape Heritage grants was extremely strong: only 13 of the 30 applications from all over the UK were successful.

The HLF funding is to be matched with investment led by Fenland District Council, which is contributing £230,000, along with Cambridgeshire County Council (£200,000), the Wisbech Society (£25,000) and Wisbech Town Council (£25,000).

The project team will now spend the next year preparing a second round application to the HLF. That will see the development of a more detailed proposal for the physical works and a series of projects designed to secure the active involvement of local businesses, colleges and community groups.



Councillor David Oliver, FDC's Cabinet member responsible for conservation and Leader of Wisbech Town Council, said: 'We are delighted to have secured this initial backing for the Wisbech High Street project. The area was identified in Wisbech 2020 as requiring investment and regeneration and this is a welcome first step in achieving this goal.'

'We would like to thank all the local stakeholders who have already contributed so much to the development of the first round bid and we look forward to working with them during the second round.'

Councillor John Clark, FDC's Leader, said: "It's a great achievement for the Council and its partners to have got the HLF's go-ahead to take this scheme forward. It's another big vote of confidence in our plans for revitalising the town."

"The project will help transform this vital area in the heart of Wisbech and that in turn will help raise the town's profile and increase the potential for further investment. The support we've had from the consultation group and the local community has been a major factor in winning the HLF's approval in the face of strong competition from schemes from across the whole country."

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader Steve Count, said: "This is a great step forward in helping to rejuvenate this area of Wisbech. Attracting more businesses and improving the heart of the town is part of the Wisbech 2020 vision and this news will help make that a reality. It also shows what partners can do when they work together and I hope we will continue to do so to secure the final funding that will make such a difference to the communities in and around Wisbech."

Ray Johnson, chairman of the Wisbech Society, said: "People in Wisbech will be delighted by this news. The enthusiastic response to the consultation we helped to organise last year showed the great support there is for restoring these buildings."

"As a local heritage society, we have worked on this scheme for the past two years and have demonstrated our wholehearted commitment to it by pledging £25,000. Now, as we move on to the second stage of the bid, we will continue to do all we can to deliver a project that will truly revive the heritage of Wisbech."

Steve Barclay, MP for North East Cambridgeshire, said: "This is great news for Fenland and marks another positive step forward in attracting investment into Wisbech. Derelict buildings blighted the town for too long and this, along with progress on Constantine House and new schemes like the Light Cinema and restaurants and the new College of West Anglia building show the improvements being made."

Press release

Page 3 of 3



Ben Greener, HLF's Regeneration Advisor, said: "Regeneration involves transforming places. Heritage is often central to this process, whether in the form of restoring a much-loved landmark or refurbishing boarded-up buildings.

"We believe that historic townscapes such as Wisbech High Street are the beating heart of local places. Past Heritage Lottery Fund research shows that even small changes, such as improving shop fronts or restoring a building's historic features, can make a real difference."

The HLF funding, which is also supported by contributions from property owners, is sought to undertake structural and external repairs to buildings, bring vacant units back in to use and repair architectural detail.

Alongside the physical repair and restoration work, the HLF requires the funding to be used to engage the community in the project through an "Activity Plan".

The emerging plan, designed in partnership with a range of community groups, seeks to engage local people and businesses to get involved in heritage through education, training and leisure activities. The many proposed activities include:

- Formal post-16 / adult training in conservation construction with practical restoration projects
- Accredited building maintenance courses for owners, stewards, occupiers
- Community archaeology events
- Interior and shop front design work experience with students from the Thomas Clarkson Academy
- The involvement of NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) in the restoration work
- Expanding and capitalising on the national Heritage Open Days programme

Fenland District Council is committed to continuing to engage the local community in the project through an established Consultative Group and various public consultation events. Further details of these will be publicised in due course.

— ENDS —

Background Notes to editors:

¹ An HLF Townscape Heritage (TH) first-round pass means that money has been set aside by HLF. The applicants can then progress to the second round and send a detailed second-round submission to secure



the full award. This early level of strong financial commitment means that THs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided their final proposals fully meet the programme criteria.

² THs encourage partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces. Grants are available from £100,000 up to £2m. The next application deadline is 1 September 2015 with decisions being made in January 2016.

To date, HLF has invested £253m regenerating towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

From the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, we use National Lottery players' money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about. www.hlf.org.uk.

For more information please contact Katie Owen, HLF press office, on 020 7591 6036 or 07973 613820

About Wisbech

Wisbech is known as the Capital of the Fens and is arguably the finest Georgian market town and port in the East of England. The town centre contains a large conservation area containing many Listed buildings and areas of historic importance, including the Crescent and North and South Brink.

However due to a combination of underlying economic and social factors, the built environment in Wisbech has suffered and exhibits significant heritage and market failure. Many buildings in the town centre are at risk or vulnerable and some buildings have already suffered fatal collapse.

It is with this background that Fenland District Council, its partners and the community submitted a funding application for the Heritage Lottery Fund Townscape Heritage programme in August 2014.

For more information please contact Fenland District Council press office on: 01354 622226