

Hollywood old school - open for lessons

13/01/2009

One of Hollywood's most important buildings has been officially reopened today (Tuesday 13th January 2009) following a programme of extensive restoration. The Old School on Church Road has undergone a £600,000, year long programme of repair and refurbishment and will now be used as a community facility for Hollywood.

The Old School was one of the first buildings to have been constructed above the then expanding town in 1845. It served the community as a school, church hall and scout hall before being abandoned due to the deterioration of the building.

The restoration work was undertaken by Hollywood Old School Preservation Trust with the support of a £455,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Additional funding was also provided by the Environment and Heritage Service (now NIEA), Ulster Garden Villages, the Garfield Weston Foundation, Better Belfast, Low Carbon Building Programme, the 2nd Hollywood Scouts, the Church of Ireland and a large number of individual donors. There was also a number of direct-funding schemes including collection boxes in local shops, concerts, selling 'bricks' on Mayday and Hollywood dances at the Culloden Hotel.

Chairman of Hollywood Old School Preservation Trust, Robert Maxwell, said: "The Old School is so important to the town of Hollywood. It is held in high regard locally as it has made a big contribution to education, benefited the town's young people and will now provide a much needed community facility for the people of Hollywood. On behalf of The Trust, I would like to thank all of the organisations, businesses and individuals who have helped to make this project possible."

The Old School was officially reopened by Ronnie Spence, Trustee and Chairman of the HLF Committee for Northern Ireland. The HLF grant was awarded through its Heritage Grants scheme, and included funding for an educational programme which involved the development of a timeline, production of an educational leaflet, a series of historic walks and lectures on themes ranging from historic buildings and architecture to landscaping and sustainability.

Speaking at the reopening, Mr Spence, said: "It gives me great pleasure officially to reopen the Old School. This important building is part of the rich history of the area and will not only provide a space for community activities, but through the ongoing educational and outreach activities will enable people to learn about and enjoy their heritage."

Since its restoration the Old School has been put back into use as a community facility for Hollywood. It has already attracted many regular and occasional users and tenants for its small accommodation and office units and Hollywood Old School Preservation Trust now uses part of the building as an office location. The 2nd Hollywood Scouts are once again using the hall and other regular users include keep fit and ballet classes, and Queen's University and Belfast Metropolitan College lectures. Occasional users have included the Hollywood Players, the Hollywood Conservation Group, Hollywood Transition Town, Camphill Community and private parties and

events.

Community groups or organisations that wish to avail of the facilities at the Old School should contact Mervyn Black on 028 9042 5269.