

Chelsea Pensioners' Stable Block to open doors for the first time

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Opening the main stable doors for work to begin on the three-year project. Pictured left to right: Chelsea Pensioners, James Little, BEM and Carol Knight. Grainge Photography
A new grant will allow the Royal Hospital Chelsea to publicly open part of its building for the first time, enabling visitors to learn more about its unique history.

We have awarded £3.2million to a transformational project that will give the public the chance to see behind the scenes at the historic Royal Hospital Chelsea.

The site is home to the Chelsea Pensioners – a much-loved community of former British soldiers who are particularly well known for their scarlet coats.

Visitors will be able to enter the Sir John Soane Stable Block for the first time since the hospital opened in 1692.

The Chelsea Pensioners are already well-loved, but this project will bring their world to life, giving behind the scenes access to this beautiful building.

Eilish McGuinness, Chief Executive at The National Lottery Heritage Fund

The project

The three-year project will bring the remarkable story of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and the Chelsea Pensioners to life. A programme of activity open to the public will run throughout the restoration works and beyond, including hard hat tours, family fun days and specialist events, led by Chelsea Pensioners.

The project will restore Sir John Soane's Grade II* listed Stables, lauded by architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as 'a miracle of abstract design'. A new Outreach, Heritage and Visitor Centre will improve access for everyone – uniting visitors, volunteers and communities for the first time.

The centre will be open daily and include:

- an outreach space for learning, wellbeing activities and new volunteering programmes
- a permanent free exhibition, including audio-visuals and unseen artefacts from the Royal Hospital Chelsea collection
- opportunities to meet Chelsea Pensioners
- new public facilities including a shop, community post office and café with a courtyard

Ongoing engagement activities

There will be additional activities throughout the project to provide the public with opportunities to learn about the unique heritage of the Chelsea Pensioners and Royal Hospital Chelsea.

These will include:

- **stories of the hospital** – a programme of intergenerational activities involving Chelsea Pensioners, cadets and serving members of the Army, sharing oral histories
- a **heritage, health and wellbeing programme** for people living with dementia, carers and non-resident veterans and an outreach programme for the wider Army community
- **heritage skills opportunities** including internships, volunteering and work experience

The legacy of their home and heritage

Today, the Royal Hospital Chelsea is home to around 300 army veterans, including those who have served in Korea, the Falkland Islands, Cyprus and Second World War. The site itself is situated on 66 acres in the centre of London and includes an important architectural legacy – with Grade I and II listed buildings designed by Charles II and Sir Christopher Wren over 300 years ago.

Eilish McGuinness, Chief Executive at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We are delighted to support the Royal Chelsea Hospital with this fantastic project. The Chelsea Pensioners are already well-loved, but this project will bring their world to life, giving behind the scenes access to this beautiful building, but also will tell stories connected to the Chelsea Pensioners' heritage and history and linking to the wider community."

The site has been in urgent need of restoration for some years, and we are now closer to realising its full potential as a hub for visitors.

Gary Lashko, CEO of Royal Hospital Chelsea

Gary Lashko, CEO of Royal Hospital Chelsea said: “We are immensely grateful to the Heritage Fund for this grant, which will enable the Hospital to open up the Stable Block to visitors for the first time. The site has been in urgent need of restoration for some years, and we are now closer to realising its full potential as a hub for visitors; including other military veterans in the community and as a site for sharing our unique, centuries-old history.

“We hope this project will contribute to the development of the Chelsea Heritage Quarter, which we are developing with our partners at the National Army Museum and Chelsea Physic Garden.”

Find out more

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If you're interested in applying for a grant, read more about our [National Lottery Grants for Heritage](#).

For more information on the Royal Hospital Chelsea and to stay up-to-date visit the [Chelsea Pensioners website](#).

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