

Blackpool moves one step closer to £20million museum dream

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Together with funding from Blackpool Council and volunteer support this creates a £1.6m pot for the development stage of the project.

The Blackpool Museum, planned for the Winter Gardens building, will tell the extraordinary story of the world's first working-class seaside resort, celebrating its contribution to British and Western popular culture. As well as displaying the council's own nationally-significant collections in an imaginative, immersive way, there will be quality space for temporary exhibitions, co-created with communities, the V&A and others.

It will be based in the Grade II* Winter Gardens, saving the Pavilion Theatre from dereliction and finding a use for other underutilised spaces.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Leader of Blackpool Council, said: “I am absolutely delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has chosen to support this exciting project. We know that they had many applications to consider and I am over the moon that they saw the potential in our proposal. It is less than 12 months ago that I assembled a group of council officers and said that I felt there should be a museum of some kind in Blackpool that would showcase the rich history the town has. To have come so far, so quickly, is a tribute to their dedication, hard work and commitment and our tenacity.

“It has taken some time for us to pull this particular project together as we did not want to just create a collection of Blackpool’s history. We want to do something completely unique that you would only experience here. It will not be a conventional museum – it will be a dynamic and celebratory space - a blend of museum, visitor attraction and theatre, filled with artefacts, film, music and performance. It will have a strong personality with a memorable and distinctive take which is true to the lively spirit of Blackpool. After much careful consideration Winter Gardens was decided as the most suitable location. This funding will enable us to carry out really detailed surveys of the Pavilion Theatre to ensure we know exactly how the attraction would be designed and built.”

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: “We’re delighted to be giving our initial support for this project that marks the culmination of many years’ of hard work and dedication from a variety of partners, most importantly from the council, whose recognition of the importance of Blackpool’s heritage and collections and how these can play a central role in the city’s wider regeneration have helped create these truly visionary plans. Getting volunteers involved has been another vital piece of the puzzle and something that has gone a long way to securing Blackpool’s heritage offer and ensuring the important involvement of local people from the start. It’s really exciting that these plans to create Blackpool’s first museum, can truly get under way now and, once completed, will mean the best of Blackpool is properly presented to local people and the millions of tourists that visit every year.”

Cllr Simon Blackburn continued: “This is absolutely the right time for a museum of this type in Blackpool. We are in danger of losing the wonderful memories from the older generation who have lived and holidayed here over the years. Blackpool’s heritage is about people and their stories. Introduce Blackpool into the conversation virtually anywhere in the UK and the stories flow – always intensely personal, often funny, slightly quirky and strangely bizarre. It is this delightful, rich, community memory which brings our heritage so vividly alive. These stories lie at the very heart of our project. We need to capture that information now so it can be showcased to future generations. The museum project will continue to be part of my portfolio, as I wish to ensure that it receives the highest of profiles.”

This project aims to create a brand new museum telling ‘The Blackpool Story’. It will provide a local heritage focus for Blackpool people reconnecting them with their own history. It will also be a major visitor attraction. It will be a high quality, professional, self-sustaining business with the capacity to reinvest resources to support heritage-based learning and community programmes.

- during 18 month development stage 10 jobs will be created to carry out three main objectives:
Building a solid foundation – consisting of the development of the business case and strategic plan for the museum
- creating the museum – preparing for capital works by carrying out in depth surveys, public engagement and consultation, collecting stories and developing concepts
- raising the projects profile – talking to partners and the local community to develop communication plans

Following the development stage, Blackpool Council will apply for £20million for the implementation of the museum.

Notes to editors

Initial support means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so this is an endorsement of outline proposals. The project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to secure a firm award.

About the funding

The development phase totals £1,617,200, of which £1,240,200 is requested from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Of the remainder £137,000 is identified as support in kind (made up of volunteer time) and £240,000 cash contribution from Blackpool Council.

About The Winter Gardens and the Pavilion Theatre:

The Winter Gardens was built on an ambitious scale to provide a vibrant, theatrical experience. It has hosted a cast of thousands over the years, adding up to a unrivalled roll-call of British and world entertainment. At its heart sits the Pavilion Theatre. Created as a concert hall in 1878, it opens out onto an ambulatory, known as the Horseshoe and was intended as a music and fine entertainment venue. Circus and aerial shows were added to attract more day trippers. Conversion to a theatre in 1889 was followed by major re-building in 1897, resulting in a splendidly opulent apsidal-ended music hall. The beautiful plasterwork, designed by J M Boekinder, was completed in 1904. In the 1920s, it became a picture palace and by the 1950s was used for summer shows. Household names such as Morecambe & Wise and Tommy Cooper performed there. Although still a very beautiful and strangely atmospheric place, it is little used and in need of significant repair and restoration.

Further information

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