

Banham PCC wins Heritage Lottery Fund support

Banham Parochial Church Council has received initial support* for the St. Mary's Church Restoration Project, it was announced today. The project aims to carry out urgent high-level structural repairs to the fabric of St. Mary the Virgin Church in Banham. The restoration will serve to conserve and protect this Grade I listed building in the heart of the community for the enjoyment of future generations. The project also aims to widen the understanding of heritage within St. Mary's through a range of interpretive activities including heritage workshops.

Heritage Lottery Fund Development funding of £24,300 has been awarded to help Banham PCC progress its plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

The project aims to carry out essential conservation work to the tower staircase and buttress, the east chancel window and south aisle rainwater drainage. A heritage activity programme is also planned to showcase and deepen the understanding of a variety of heritage elements within the building such as the stained glass windows, ornate wood-carvings, brass work, medieval knight effigy, flint-knapping and bell-ringing.

Dating back to the early fourteenth century, St. Mary the Virgin Church, Banham, is part of the Church of England and is in the Diocese of Norwich. The tower supports one of Norfolk's few spires – in this case of timber covered in herringbone lead-work. The church contains a wide variety of stained glass ranging in date from the medieval period through to Victorian and some of this glass is thought to be extremely rare. Four out of the six bells are medieval.

The church building serves to enhance the life of local people and the wider community not only as an historic meeting place for religious worship, but also hosts a wide range of activities for the enjoyment of young and old alike. For example, St. Mary's hosts the Youth Café, run in partnership with Integrate Youth for Christ. The Café attracts up to 70 secondary school-aged young people from the village and surrounding areas to meet and enjoy fun and games every Friday night during term time. The PCC believes that this is likely to be the biggest weekly youth activity in any single place, sacred or secular, in Norfolk. Messy Church attracts up to 20 pre-school and primary school-aged children and their families, who meet in St. Mary's on a Sunday afternoon every 2 months to learn about Christ-centred values whilst enjoying fun activities based on creativity, hospitality and celebration. One Saturday every month St Mary's hosts the Saturday Café, serving fine cakes and even finer bacon rolls. This is a real community building event, attracting many villagers and visitors of all ages. At various times of the year St. Mary's becomes a village cinema through a scheme called Village Screen East. People young and old, families and single people gather to watch recently released movies and some not so recent, borrowed from the East of England Film Archive. Open Door is a social outreach initiative, providing a venue for older (but not exclusively so) people to meet together one afternoon every month for tea and delicious cakes. It is an opportunity for mutual support and is greatly appreciated by those who attend.

Anita Bounds from Banham PCC said "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. This is a huge achievement for Banham. St. Mary's is such an important focal point for the local and wider community, and it is so rewarding that we are a step closer to preserving it for another century. We welcome additional volunteer help with developing our heritage activities and/or donations to help us progress our vital conservation and restoration work. Please contact me on

01953-887084 or email anita@boundsconsulting.co.uk for further details of how you can get involved.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “Norfolk’s historic and diverse places of worship are so often at the heart of our communities. St Mary the Virgin at Banham is an excellent example of how HLF can help conserve a much loved building so it can continue to serve local people of all ages. We look forward to receiving the detailed restoration plans in due course.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

*Heritage Grants applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also, as in this case, include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.

About Banham PCC

The church of St Mary the Virgin has been at the centre of village life in Banham since the 14th century and remains so to this day thanks largely to the past and present efforts of the Parochial Church Council (PCC). We are a changing and developing rural community and as such the PCC is ensuring the church is developing to meet the spiritual needs of our villagers, young and old alike. We worship in a traditional way but are eager to embrace new ideas and fresh expressions as Christians guided by the Holy Spirit and although our Sunday congregations may be small our church is in much demand for those happy and sad occasions of life. We are part of the Quidenham Group of six Parishes which after a year of Vacancy will soon be headed by a new Priest in Charge. The Diocese of Norwich is actively seeking a new Incumbent. The Parish is run by eight volunteer members of the Parochial Church Council, who are either ex officio or elected annually in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. The PCC has no salaried officials, either full or part-time. Our magnificent church spire is a landmark that can be seen for miles and was used in WW II to guide the bomber and fighter pilots home to the safety of Old Buckenham airfield...we like to think our spire continues to guide people home to safety in Christ.

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.

[Include contacts for further information]

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