

Funding for £1.2m Winckley Square gardens restoration is approved

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Computerised image of Winckley Square after restoration

The Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund have today announced a bid for almost £950,000 for the restoration project was successful.

It has been described as a 'big day in the history of Preston' and comes four years after a campaign to renovate the gardens was launched by the Winckley Square Community Interest Company (WSCIC).

The project, which is also receiving funds from Preston's Business Improvement District and smaller grants, will enable a 'sympathetic restoration' of the gardens to get underway as early as 2016.

The improvements to the gardens include the restoration of the Robert Peel statue, work to resolve the current flooding issues, new lighting, creating a social space, historical reference points and more.

David Gill, Chairman and a Cofounder of the WSCIC, said: "We're delighted to see so much hard work come to fruition. We started this campaign because we felt Winckley Square was in danger of

permanent decline. By the community coming together we have managed to create and fund an exciting new future for everyone connected with the Square.

“A huge thanks must go to all our partners for help making this happen. I'm sure everyone connected with Preston can't wait to see this sympathetic, yet transformational restoration come alive.”

The campaign to renovate the gardens started in 2011 when six local professionals started the WSCIC. It has since formed a partnership between environmental charity Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside, Preston City Council, Preston Business Improvement District (BID) and Lancashire County Council.

A group of local historians who helped derail a controversial modernisation of the gardens in 2009 also played a lead role in the new designs.

The proposed improvements include:

- Resolving the current flooding problems through improved land drainage in the lower parts of the gardens
- Opening up lines of sight across the gardens to improve visibility, and introducing lighting into the gardens improve security at night times
- Creation of new heritage reference points, plaques and displays throughout the gardens allowing visitors to discover more about the story of the gardens
- Wider footpaths with new high quality surfaces that befits the status and the historic character of Winckley Square
- Replacement of worn and outdated 1980s seating
- Cleaning and repairing the Robert Peel statue, restoring its original inscriptions, and providing a higher quality setting for the statue
- Removal of inappropriate modern additions to the tree population, and restocking to ensure the survival of the garden's historic tree population
- Creating a high quality social space at the convergence of the footpaths in the south of the gardens, including provision of historical reference points

Reinforcing the turf in the southern part of the gardens, enabling greater year-round use to host events which celebrate the heritage and cultural richness of the City of Preston.

Led by Groundwork, the design process included a dedicated conservation management plan developed by a team of notable Preston historians from groups such as the Preston and South Ribble Civic Trust, Preston Historical Society, Lancashire Gardens Trust and Blog Preston.

Andrew Darron, Executive Director at Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside said: "We're over the moon at this announcement. Winckley Square is such an iconic part of Preston's landscape, and to have the city put its faith in our team to plan its future has been a privilege for us.

“The way in which the local businesses have come together to drive this project forward has been an inspiration, and equally the support that we have had from Preston's local historians in shaping our understanding of the Square's heritage and how to approach it has been invaluable.”

Andrew Mather of the Preston Historical Society said: "Groundwork has produced plans sensitive to the history and heritage of the gardens, taking into account the trees and biodiversity, the archaeology, improved drainage, and last but not least, community involvement, recreation, volunteering and education.

"It has been a pleasure to work with so many people dedicated to bringing Winckley Square gardens to life again without sacrificing Preston's 'Living Lung' and I look forward now to all their hard work coming to fruition during the next two years."

Babs Murphy, Chief Executive of the North and Western Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, described the funding win as "fantastic".

She said: "This vital grant that will enable the Winckley Square CIC to do so much good would never have been possible without the hard work and tens of thousands of pounds of investment from the Preston City Centre Business Improvement District (BID).

"Indeed it was a condition in order to receive the funding that the BID put £30,000 per year into the Square, and the team has done a great deal of work to increase the utilisation of the gardens, through initiatives such as the Winckley Square Hangout.

"I now look forward to seeing Winckley Square returned to its former glory."

Simon Turner, Director and Cofounder of the WSCIC, added: "It's a big day in the history of Preston. This project can be a catalyst to creating a vibrant heritage and cultural district for Preston, something any European city would be proud of. It's also a great example of what can happen when people work together."

Councillor John Swindells, Deputy Leader of Preston City Council, said: "What a tremendous result and yet another major boost for Preston city centre.

"Home to many thriving businesses, beautiful scenery and a unique history, Winckley Square is such a real treasure for Preston. Now, thanks to the hard work of local business people, voluntary organisations and the city and county councils, Winckley Square will be fully restored to all its former glory.

"What a great place it will be to live, visit and work. Proud Preston? It certainly will be and I can't wait to see the transformation take place."

Councillor Jennifer Mein, Leader of Lancashire County Council, added: "Preston needs to be an attractive and welcoming place for visitors and businesses alike, and these proposals, at the heart of the professional services quarter of the city centre will play a major part in supporting business growth and investment in the city.

"We are continuing the improvements along Fishergate which provides a great opportunity to increase integration between the square and the city centre.

"The development of the city centre is a core objective of the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal. These superb plans complement the City Deal work programme, which will boost growth and prosperity for the next decade and beyond."

HLF's Chair, Sir Peter Luff, said, on behalf of HLF and the Big Lottery Fund: "We all benefit from spending time outside in the fresh air, so it's vital that we look after our green spaces, particularly in dense urban areas. National Lottery players' money will give a boost to Winckley Square helping make sure they have a great future."

WSCIC was founded by local professionals David Gill, Simon Turner, Mick Goode, John Chesworth, Richard McDowell and Mark Clarkson, who are directors of WSCIC.

In addition to the founding members, the board of directors includes representatives from Lancashire County Council, Preston City Council, BID and Preston Historical Society.

The Business Improvement District (BID) pledged £150,000 over five years in 2011.

WSCIC conducted a public consultation in 2012. Over 250 members of the public took part wishing a sympathetic restoration of the Square. In 2014, nearly 300 people participated in a more detailed survey which has informed the development of the vision for the green space, and a programme of activities which will connect people with the heritage.

In April 2013, it was announced that Preston City Council had received initial support for a Townscape Heritage (TH) bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which will improve the condition of some of the significant buildings of the Square, and aspects of the public realm.

The conservation management plan was developed by:

- Aidan Turner-Bishop, Chairman of the Preston and South Ribble Civic Trust
- David John Hindle, President of the Preston Historical Society, local historian and author
- Paul Swarbrick, co-editor for Blog Preston
- Stephen Sartin, local historian, author and former Curator of the Harris Museum
- Dr Alan Crosby, local and regional historian, author, editor and lecturer
- Andrew Mather, Preston Historical Society
- Elaine Taylor of the Lancashire Gardens Trust
- Maria Luczak, an expert on historic landscapes and with experience of working on other successful HLF projects

What happens next:

- Consultation and securing formal consent for works to the Square's tree population
- Securing legal agreements with the Square's landowners
- Appointing a project officer to co-ordinate the involvement of local people in the further development of the project
- Tendering the works and appointing an appropriately experienced main contractor
- Start

Notes to editors:

This announcement forms part of a wider package of 16 parks and cemeteries announced today by HLF and the Big Lottery Fund as receiving funding to the value of £34million.

About Winckley Square

Winckley Square was the brainchild of the Preston attorney William Cross who purchased Town End Field from Thomas Winckley. Mr Cross built the first house on the square in 1799 – now number 7. He named the Square after the Winckley family. It was developed by Cross as an exclusive residential area. The original occupants of the Square were professional gentleman and wealthy manufacturers.

Further information

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