

29 January 2008

BOOST TO CITY VARIETIES RENOVATION PLAN WITH SWAN PUB DEAL

An ambitious plan to renovate one of the oldest music halls in the country, the Leeds City Varieties, has taken a step forward with Leeds City Council signing a deal to acquire the pub underneath the music hall, which will enable the improvements to be made.

The deal, with the former owners of The Swan, Mitchells and Butlers, means that the council can now move to the second crucial stage* of securing funding for the renovation plan from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which last year earmarked a grant of £3m towards to the overall £9.2m project.

The Leeds City Varieties Music Hall is best known as the home of BBC TV's 'The Good Old Days', shown from 1953 to 1983. It is a Grade II listed building and one of the very few surviving music hall theatres in the country. As well as renovating and conserving the much-loved building, the Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera House Ltd - the owners of the City Varieties - will develop an exciting learning programme to help schoolchildren and visitors explore and enjoy the building's history and heritage.

Councillor Andrew Carter, Leader of Leeds City Council, said:

"The deal to acquire The Swan pub is a vital part of the whole renovation project and it is great that we have reached this important milestone. It provides greater certainty that the project will be implemented and that the improvements will be made to help secure the long-term future of this unique building for future generations."

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The £3m grant from the HLF will be supplemented by funding provided by Leeds City Council (£5.2m) and the Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera House Ltd (£1m). This £1m contribution is the subject of a fundraising campaign at a national and local level.

Councillor John Procter, Leeds City Council executive member for leisure and Chairman of the Leeds Grand Theatre Board, which includes the City Varieties and which is overseeing the fundraising campaign, said:

“The acquisition of The Swan provides a key impetus to our fundraising campaign. We can now offer potential funders really exciting opportunities for events, activities and naming rights relating to their support. We are still eager to hear from businesses or individuals who are keen to partner with us in this exciting project.”

The Heritage Lottery Fund works to enable communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about the UK’s diverse heritage. The stage one City Varieties grant, is one of over 2,200 projects in Yorkshire and the Humber in which the HLF has invested over £300m.

Of the City Varieties, Fiona Spiers, HLF regional manager for the Yorkshire and the Humber, said:

“This wonderful building is held in great affection. The Heritage Lottery Fund’s investment will help ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy it and learn about its history.”

The City Varieties music hall grew out of the Swan public house in 1865. The original owner, Charles Thornton, sought to capitalise on the huge popularity of music hall performances by replacing the Swan Inn that previously occupied the site, with what is now the City Varieties and The Swan bar.

The refurbishment of the City Varieties, particularly the auditorium and the circle bar, will focus on the building as it was in the late 19th century when the main building elements existed as we know them today. The proposals include general improvement of circulation

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for people around the building, better toilet facilities and improved heating and ventilation systems. The backstage area will see major improvements to both the spaces and technical facilities available for a range of different performances.

While physical alterations within the Swan will be limited, its acquisition will not only facilitate many of the improvements already identified but it will enable a new box office to be built linking The Swan and the Music Hall. This will provide extra space for a larger ground floor entrance and a new lift providing disabled access to the theatre. The Swan will not be lost to the city – only small parts of the pub will be incorporated into the Varieties. The pub will remain open as usual until required for the start of work on the City Varieties refurbishment in Spring 2009. It will re-open once the work has been completed in the Summer of 2010.

Work is now underway to prepare the Stage 2 application to the HLF and more detailed designs for submission for planning and listed building consent in the Spring.

For fundraising enquiries, people can contact Peter Sandeman, General Manager, City Varieties Music Hall, Swan Street, Leeds, LS1 6LW. Tel 0113 3917777. E Mail p.sandeman@cityvarieties.co.uk

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Notes to Editors:

1. *Leeds's Stage 1 bid for funding from the HLF was granted in September 2007. A successful Stage 1 bid means that money has been earmarked by the HLF for the project and that the applicant can progress to Stage 2 to submit a further, fully developed application to secure the full grant. While this does not guarantee funding, it is an indication of positive support, and money for the scheme is set aside by the HLF.

2. The Leeds City Varieties was acquired by the council in 1987 to save it from redevelopment. Ownership passed immediately to the Leeds Grand Theatre and Opera House Ltd.

3. The Heritage Lottery Fund enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more

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about our diverse heritage. Over the last 13 years, HLF has awarded almost £1.25billion to over 10,000 historic buildings and monuments across the UK. In Yorkshire and the Humber, HLF has invested over £300m in over 2,200 projects. Website: www.hlf.org.uk For the HLF Press Office, please contact Dervish Mertcan or Katie Owen, tel: 020 7591 6102/6036.

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