

Looking to the past to shape the future of cathedral

The three main pillars of Newcastle's historic heart – Church, State and Market – have received a multi-million pound boost from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, investment that will secure the city's rich and diverse history and heritage for future generations and will help shape the city's future. KATE SUSSAMS talks about work on the cathedral



► Newcastle Cathedral and, inset, Kate Sussams
Jonathan CK Webb

IT is often said that the focus of attention and spending is always in the south but here in the North East, and especially in Newcastle, we have benefited inordinately from a phenomenal amount of investment from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The city and its historic assets have been given the recognition they deserve and awarded Heritage grants to help them deliver a sustainable future.

Since 2013, Newcastle has received multi-million pounds worth of investment in three key areas of the city, all centred on its historic, medieval quarter. We are delighted that the most recent award of £4.2m has been awarded to us here at Newcastle Cathedral, the 'Cathedral of the City', and we are hugely excited about the future.

Our project is ambitious and is expected to cost almost £6m with The National Lottery Heritage Fund grant bolstered by additional funding from the Cathedral's supporters, benefactors and charitable trusts.

A large slice of the total cost will pay for physical changes both inside and out including removing the pews and laying a new floor to create an amazing open space capable of hosting exciting new events and activities that will attract new visitors and welcome all sections of society. We will also be undertaking a significant Activity Plan which will

see hundreds of local people getting involved with their heritage, plus recruiting a huge number of volunteers who will really help bring alive the stories in our stones.

The Cathedral is where you can actually read the history of the city; it is written in the stones, walls and windows. It tells the story of local people who built Newcastle, fuelled the industrial revolution and put the city on the world map. Creating engaging and imaginative ways to bring these stories to life and provide the backdrop for this exciting new events space will be another major part of our project.

Our overarching ambition is to reinstate the Cathedral as a dynamic hub for the whole community, a vibrant, must-see attraction in the city centre and a unique events

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space for all.

We recognise that this will only be achieved through partnership and we are delighted to be working closely with NE1 Ltd, who have already set the bar high with their National Lottery Heritage Fund supported redevelopment of the Bigg Market.

Cultural heritage is one of the cornerstones of NE1's business plan for the next five years and its work in the Bigg Market is already coming to fruition with the public realm complete and two hugely successful events, The Bigg Market Bash and the first Bigg Foodie Friday already setting the tone for how the space will be used in the future. We can and will learn a lot from our collaboration with NE1 and hope to work closely together to create events that bring the community into these new spaces. We plan on hosting our very own Medieval Markets so will be looking to NE1 for their support to make these events a roaring success. On a practical level, the knowledge and experience they have amassed through their work on heritage projects will also be a major asset when shaping and delivering our plans.

It is no coincidence that the city's historic and heritage regeneration have been led by the coming together of Church, State and Business. The Cathedral represents the church; Newcastle City Council the

state with its successful regeneration of the Castle; and, business personified by the team at NE1 Ltd, the modern face of the market economy, representing the city's business interests and championing the regeneration of the Bigg Market and the wider redevelopment of the city. This three-way partnership strongly echoes the city's medieval past and reflects how Newcastle was originally formed.

The history and heritage of Newcastle is the golden thread running through all this recent redevelopment of Newcastle's medieval quarter, its historic heart. Our efforts, combined with those of the Council and NE1 Ltd, are aiming to ensure that the area continues to play its rightful part in the city's future. It is already paying dividends; you only have to consider what the Bigg Market was like a decade ago to know that the transformation has begun. The area covering the Castle and Black Gate, the Cathedral, the Mining Institute and the Bigg Market all provide a much more appealing offer for locals and tourists alike and it is only set to improve.

We want to restore the Cathedral as a place where people come for events, activities and to worship, where they socialise and do business. This will take us back to a bygone era when the great and good of the city, the eminent merchants and industrialists of the 17th and

18th centuries came to church to see and be seen. It was here that they lived their lives, conducted business, worshipped and connected with other leading families of the day.

The history of these famous North East families, names immortalised in street names across the city and woven into the fabric of Newcastle are charted here. The names on the walls and floors in the ledger stones reflect the development of Newcastle and the part it played in global industrialisation. People who built Newcastle, leading industrialists of their day were baptised, were married and were buried here. Working with NE1 we want to bring modern day business and entrepreneurs back to the Cathedral, recreating a centre of city life for business, locals, families, tourists and pilgrims alike, the heart of modern business.

Re-establishing these links between the Cathedral, the public and the business community are crucial for the next chapter of the city's history. Collectively, NE1 Ltd, Newcastle City Council and the Cathedral are all working to shape the development of the city. Together we are looking back to shape the future. History isn't just about the past, it is about positioning the city and contributing to its future economic development.

■ **Kate Sussams is Director of Operations at Newcastle Cathedral.**