

## Morpeth Railway Station (July 2015)

Following three years of research, preparation and negotiation, plans to re-model the Grade II listed Morpeth Railway Station as a building fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century use by not only rail travellers but business users as well, have received a welcome boost with the announcement of a successful lottery funding bid to enable the development of the project to proceed to the next stage.



Greater Morpeth Development Trust (GMDT) which is behind the plans, has been told it has secured initial support\*, including a development grant of £62,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to help meet the cost of the station work that would create offices for at least seven small businesses as well as restoring the 168 year old building to its former glory.

The project is estimated to be £1.4m and GMDT can now work up a final bid for the full HLF grant of £723,000. The Trust will work towards submitting that bid by next March and it is expected that a decision on

whether or not it has been successful will be made next June. If the final bid is approved the Trust would hope to begin work on site in the summer of 2016.

Any second stage lottery money awarded would form part of a financial package that already includes a contribution of £250,000 from the Railway Heritage Trust (RHT) which offers advice and grants to support the preservation, upkeep and financial sustainability of buildings and structures forming part of Britain's great Victorian railway network heritage.

Andy Savage, RHT's Executive Director, said: *"The Trust has worked with GMDT for some years to try and give this superb building - the last surviving Benjamin Green station still in railway use - a long term sustainable future. We are delighted to see the project coming together and look forward to seeing work on site in the near future."*

Northumberland County Council has also indicated its support for the proposals while Network Rail and train operators Northern Rail are both understood to be fully behind the plans. The Homes & Community Agency has already financially backed the scheme's planning application process while further funding support has come from local Stobhill County Councillor Ian Lindley.

*"It has taken three years to develop the plans for the station to the stage they are at now, and this interim lottery funding will enable us to prepare our bid for the next substantial level of financial support,"* said GMDT Chief Executive David Lodge. *"It is encouraging that our plans have passed this initial lottery funding bid stage because that indicates they are considered to have the potential to deliver a high quality scheme."*



Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: *"Historic buildings have real potential to act as a driver for regeneration and economic growth. Through our Heritage Enterprise programme, money raised by National Lottery players is enabling local communities and businesses to tap into that*

potential by covering the high costs of restoring vacant and underused heritage buildings making them fit-for-purpose as commercial, and therefore sustainable spaces.

*“This is a great first step for GMDT’s project plans. Morpeth Railway Station and the story of Benjamin Green, is of national heritage significance and this project will open up this part of our industrial heritage for everyone.”*



GMDT says Morpeth is a perfect fit for proposals to preserve and conserve one of the most noted surviving historic railway stations along the East Coast main line. Designed by renowned architect Benjamin Green, the station was built for the Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company in 1847. Green, along with his father John, was

responsible for the design of other iconic North East structures such as Newcastle’s Theatre Royal, Grey’s Monument and the Penshaw Monument folly.

Although platform facilities have been improved recently, with the installation of lifts to access the two platforms, a new shelter on the southbound platform and realtime train information displays, there has been no major investment in the Morpeth station buildings for the past 20 years resulting in its somewhat run-down appearance with much of its building space unused.

Under the GMDT plans trackside buildings would be repaired and modernised and the station’s impressive portico entrance would be opened up, new toilet, cafeteria and ticket office facilities provided. Around 500 square metres of floor space would then be used to create modern office facilities for up to seven small businesses.

*“Morpeth once again needs a first-class railway station and our plans will provide just that,”* said GMDT chairman Doug Phillips. *“Not only is Morpeth the busiest Northumberland main passenger stop between Newcastle and Edinburgh on the East Coast line, it is now being increasingly used by commuters and shoppers travelling in and out of Newcastle and the MetroCentre.*

*“With the number of houses being proposed for Morpeth, we can only see passenger traffic using the station increasing significantly in the years ahead so modern facilities are needed for them. The town also urgently needs more modern accommodation for small businesses and what better place for them to be housed than in what would be a main line trackside location that could become a unique marketing tool for them to exploit!”*

*“The station project is a challenging one to develop but it opens up a fantastic opportunity to once again bring an historic Morpeth building into 21<sup>st</sup> Century use,”* added Mr Lodge.

Referring to the work the Trust completed six years ago to revamp the 300 year old John Vanbrugh designed Morpeth Town Hall which has once again become a hub of community use in the town, Mr Lodge said: *“We have a proven track record as a Trust in ensuring an historic old building is fit-for-purpose as a modern facility and we are more than confident we can now go on and do the same at the railway station.”*

Mr Ian Lavery, MP for Wansbeck who wrote to the HLF supporting the Trust’s initial funding bid, said he was delighted to hear that it has been successful. *“Passing this stage of the bidding process will allow the Trust to work up its main application in detail for a level of funding support that would hopefully enable the station plans to proceed in the quite near future,”* he said.

*“That would be great news for travellers and entrepreneurs looking for the right sort of modern office accommodation to grow their businesses in Morpeth.”*

Councillor Grant Davey, Leader of Northumberland County Council, added: *“It is good to hear Greater Morpeth Development Trust has secured funding to develop a new enterprise centre in the railway station. We are working with the Trust to deliver the full scheme and hopefully this will support small business growth in Morpeth as well as improving the station amenities for users.”*

## **Notes**

### **Heritage Lottery Fund**

**A first-round pass/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, for a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about – from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. [www.hlf.org.uk@heritagelottery](http://www.hlf.org.uk@heritagelottery)