

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE

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Historical properties get new lease of life as part of Wisbech High Street Project

Major regeneration works which have breathed new life into a row of historic buildings on Wisbech High Street are nearing completion.

Significant internal and external repairs have been carried out at 13-17 High Street, and the derelict first floors have been brought back into use for the first time in 30 years thanks to residential conversion works. Historical architectural features have also been reinstated and new traditional shopfronts added, with full completion on site due by the end of March.

The extensive works have been made possible thanks to grant funding awarded through Fenland District Council's Wisbech High Street Project, which is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Townscape Heritage Scheme.

The scheme, which uses funds raised by National Lottery players, is aimed at helping reverse the decline of the country's historic townscapes, with grants available to owners and occupiers to restore their historic buildings and bring empty properties back into use.

Meanwhile, work on 'The Gap' at 24 High Street continues to be brought forward as part of the project, and improvements are due to get underway shortly at 19 High Street to complement those already being completed next door at No.18.

A final call for property owners to take advantage of grant funding available through the project in November has also resulted in more owners putting forward proposals to renovate their properties. These are now being reviewed, with more updates on these coming soon!

However, while there continues to be much positive progress on the High Street, rising inflation and ongoing supply issues caused by the coronavirus pandemic have caused the works at 11-12 High Street to be delayed. The costs to regenerate these two properties are now significantly higher than projected to make the scheme viable.

The Council will continue to work closely with its partners to look for a viable way to bring the scheme at Nos.11-12 forward and further enhance the High Street, given the post pandemic climate on the construction industry.

The Wisbech High Street Project's activities and events programme, which provides people with opportunities to learn more about the town's heritage as well as traditional construction and building maintenance skills, is also being further developed.

During the pandemic, the programme was adapted due to Covid restrictions but included the popular Wisbech Underground 3D scans, the publication of the 'Lost Images of Wisbech' book, online photographic exhibitions and a series of online heritage skills talks.

Another online talk is being held on Tuesday 5 April – check the Wisbech High Street Project website (activities tab) for details soon – and a fresh programme of events is being launched in the Spring!

Cllr Chris Seaton, Fenland District Council's Portfolio Holder for Heritage, said: "I'm delighted to see such a significant heritage project come to fruition through the Wisbech High Street Project. Not only have the previously dilapidated buildings at 13-17 High Street been restored to their former glory, but it has made a huge difference to the whole area.

"I'm pleased that works on other properties are progressing well too, which is why it is incredibly disappointing for both the Council and our partners that we're not able to progress the scheme at 11-12 High Street as we'd envisaged. The impact of the pandemic, materials shortages and cost hikes has meant that we've had to delay this project, but we will continue to look for a viable way to bring it forward.

"My thanks as always to The National Lottery Heritage Fund who has invested significantly into these redevelopments on the High Street. The work to date and in the coming months shows the commitment from property owners to sympathetically restore the town's historic qualities and my thanks goes to them as well for getting on board. Together we can boost footfall into the town centre and transform the High Street back into the impressive gateway it once was."

- For more information on the Wisbech High Street Project, visit www.highstreetwisbech.org.uk

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Notes to editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

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