

# Tunbridge Wells Cultural & Learning Hub

## The Heritage Lottery Fund to give grant for cultural and learning Hub

Media Release

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History, culture and learning will be coming under one roof in Royal Tunbridge Wells thanks to National Lottery players and a £4.3 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project to create a cultural and learning hub in the town, bringing together Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery, the library and Adult Education Centre, is now possible following the announcement of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The exciting proposal by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council will create a space to engage with art, culture and the heritage of Tunbridge Wells, to learn new skills, socialise and be inspired.

The building will house the museum's important objects and paintings, including the internationally significant collection of Tunbridge Ware, and the new setting will tell the story of the not always so genteel past of Tunbridge Wells.

Visitors to the hub will discover Tunbridge Wells has a surprising story to tell. The Hub will retell local stories through iconic objects, such as Minnie the Lu Lu Terrier, a late Victorian beloved pet dog immortalised in a custom made Tunbridge Ware cabinet, or the Rigg dolls house, one of the best 1800s doll's houses in existence.

It will also be an opportunity to explore more unexpected stories and rarely seen collections. Highlights will include exquisite court dress of the 1700s, early British photographic pioneers, and rarely seen fine art oil paintings. A Crimean War military quilt made from uniform scraps, of which there are only about a hundred in the world, will also take pride of place in the new galleries.

The town also had an important role in the story of Votes for Women with local residents becoming leading campaigners in the suffrage movement. The National Union of Women Workers was established by resident Amelia Scott who during the course of her life gained a reputation as a social reformer. Her legacy will continue as it has been decided that the building will be named after her, although the final format of the name has yet to be agreed.

David Jukes, Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council said: 'This is a magnificent investment by Heritage Lottery Fund and demonstrates the importance of this project which we believe will change the cultural landscape in West Kent. The borough is indebted to National Lottery players.'

Mike Hill, KCC's Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services said: 'This is excellent news about this exciting project which will result in an inspirational new building in the heart of Tunbridge Wells.'

'Officers from both KCC and the borough council have been working together to help bring the hub to fruition and the Heritage Lottery Fund grant will enable us to make it a reality. We look forward to seeing construction work start in the early part of next year.'

Jane March, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Cabinet member said: 'Culture is an essential ingredient in the life of Tunbridge Wells and I am so pleased that Heritage Lottery Fund, and lottery players, have given us the opportunity to work in partnership with KCC to bring this centre to life.'

Michelle Roffe, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: 'This is a good example of two local authorities working closely together to provide a shared community space where people can learn more about their local area. Heritage can often throw up surprising stories. Thanks to £4.3million from National Lottery players, this new building will provide an opportunity to reappraise Tunbridge Wells, and to remember its genteel reputation belies its older, more hidden history, as a place of protest and dissent.'

Further financial support for the project will come from Arts Council England who have already agreed stage two funding of £886,250 subject to the project successfully securing the HLF grant.

Planning permission for the project has already been granted and now that funding is in place it is expected that building work will begin in 2019.

