



PRESS STATEMENT for immediate release

Marsden Mechanics, the iconic listed building at the heart of Marsden village, celebrates its 160th year in spectacular fashion by announcing a major new Lottery grant that secures its physical upkeep and Marsden Community Trust's role in the community for the foreseeable future. The timing of this award is also brilliant news for the worldwide Mechanics Institution movement, which is holding a conference in October to celebrate 200 years since its inception in Edinburgh in 1821.

The National Lottery Community Fund grant of nearly £194,000 is awarded under the banner *Reaching Communities England* and recognises the vital importance of Marsden Mechanics as a social and cultural hub for the local community. The evidence that persuaded the Lottery to offer the grant includes the outstanding achievements of the Trust in taking asset transfer in 2017, increasing footfall and improving its economic performance by making ground floor layout changes and introducing new branding signage that announces community ownership.

Trust Chair, Tom Lonsdale, says "This fantastic news rewards us for years of hard work, which felt like it was going to end in tears when Covid hit us, and we are so grateful to the Lottery players that make this possible. We had an application lodged with the National Lottery early in 2020, then all grant assessments were suspended and the building had to close. Ironically though, the way we came through the lockdown in collaboration with Marsden Help and Mikron Theatre Company, showed the Lottery even more clearly how integral the building is to life in the village. We even managed to raise funds to refurbish the lift and make other improvements to how the building will function in the new normal after Covid."

This phase of work is known as Marsden Mechanics Resilience Project and is split between capital works on the building and revenue investment in community and business development. A total budget of £308,900 has been programmed, of which over £200,000 will be committed to refurbishment of the external fabric, comprising replacement and repair of woodwork on the windows, clock tower and conservatory, plus rebuilding masonry on the Brougham Road elevation that has been letting water into the main hall. These repairs have been known to be needed for many years but there has been no capital money available to pay for them and community hire of the spaces inside the building is not capable of generating sufficient profit to

cover such costly items. Without the repairs though there was a growing risk that health and safety concerns could eventually lead to full closure of the building.

Kirklees Council has also recognised the importance of this project and how successful the community of Marsden has been in taking on the challenge of asset transfer, so the Council has agreed to provide the match-funding that is indispensable for any Lottery grant. Tom Lonsdale says “The Council’s gift of £84,000 achieves even more than it would have done at the time of transfer because of what it unlocks from the Lottery. It also signifies a growing commitment by Kirklees Council to work with local people and promote the benefits of true citizenship.”

With the investment in the building secure, the longer term ambition of the Trust is to develop and host community services that can be accommodated in the Mechanics. To chart the way ahead on this front a new Community and Business Development worker will be appointed, for which financial assistance with the employment costs makes up most of the remaining grant assistance. A pledge of additional match-funding towards this element, already made by Garfield Weston ahead of the Lottery award, played its own part in demonstrating confidence in the project aims and the Trust’s track record to date.

There is wonderful symmetry in the connections with history because the project cements the building back into the hands of the same community that built it in 1861 and the facilities it houses remain the same as those that motivated and inspired founders of the Mechanics Institution movement: their gathering places were primarily places of learning and culture, so having a library, the theatre company and Marsden Jazz Festival in a building that the community adapts to a host of diverse activities keeps alive a tradition that reaches its bicentenary this year. Tom will delight in sharing this story internationally at the MIW 2021 Conference.

Marsden Community Trust is a Charity and company limited by guarantee, which empowers it to take on the legal responsibility for such ventures but, behind that formal facade, there is a team of selfless volunteers from the community. They work tirelessly because imagining the village without a Mechanics is unbearable but there is always more to do and more people needed to do it. The Annual General Meeting will take place on 16 November and there will be vacancies for Trustees that need to be filled by new people who share that vision and can contribute energy and imagination.

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Trust and Mechanics website <http://www.marsdenmechanics.co.uk>

Conference details for Mechanics Institutes Worldwide 2021 <https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/events/mechanics-institutes-worldwide-2021.htm?bbeml=tp->

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Trust AGM 7.00pm 16 November 2021 in the main hall