

PRESS RELEASE

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Luton's museums team of Museum Makers set to benefit from nearly £1million funding.

There's good news for Luton this week as leading Arts, Museum and Library Trust, Luton Culture attains National Portfolio Organisation status (NPO) for museum related activity which creates even more opportunities for people to participate and engage with culture and local heritage. Almost £1million has been awarded by Arts Council England (ACE), Eastern region which will enable expansion of the culture trust's innovative volunteer and participation engagement scheme, *Museum Makers*. The **£996,000** funding will be provided over the next four years 2018-2022.

The *Museum Makers* scheme resulted from the coming together of strategic partners, volunteers, community champions and individuals in 2013, who worked on the transformation of **Wardown House, Museum and Gallery** to ensure volunteering, community engagement and participation is embedded in the culture of the museum which reopened in April this year after a £3.5m refurbishment. The vision for the redevelopment of the museum was to create a high quality visitor attraction which was a hub of cultural excellence and instil a sense of civic pride.

Museum Maker Bill Bell, a volunteer with Luton Culture for many years,, said 'People like myself volunteer because we feel we can make a tangible difference. The *Museum Makers* scheme means people can volunteer as much time as they want, from an hour here and there, to a day, or longer. I have a great sense of achievement and pride when I know I have been able to get involved and make a positive difference'

The way *Museum Makers'* model works is to set 'challenges' which members of the community sign up for; together they help shape the future direction of the Museum. There are currently over 1200 registered Museum Makers aged from 11 to 91 years old, who, collectively have donated over 4910 hours to projects, campaigns and events, including breaking a Guinness World Recordⁱ, shaping the redevelopment of the museum from the very beginning, through to final installation of objects and displays, and they continue to be a central role in the museum service offering.

Laura Lewis, Project Co-Ordinator for Museum Makers said '*Museum Makers* is a fantastic scheme created by Luton Culture which other organisations across the country have started to adopt. We have hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life, who have a passion and commitment for preserving Luton's heritage and want to help maintain a vibrant cultural offering for locals and for visitors to the town.'

Karen Perkins, Director of Arts and Museums said 'This is very exciting news for us; the **National Portfolio Organisation** status for our museums will allow us to expand and develop this scheme across our other venues, and ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the richness of

Luton Culture

arts, museums and libraries. It's great to be at the forefront of an innovative programme, working closely with local people to continue the Museum Makers project, by delivering challenges and targeted projects and opening up deeper, better and richer opportunities for young people and attracting more diverse volunteers'.

Hedley Swain, Area Director, South East, Arts Council England, said: 'Wardown House Museum & Gallery has a great track record of engaging Luton's diverse communities with its collections, particularly initiatives like 'Museum Makers'. We're pleased to support this work by welcoming Luton Culture to the 2018-22 National Portfolio for its museum related activity. With our support, Luton Culture will continue to evolve the Museum Makers initiative, whilst also developing its signature hat collection and extending its work with children and young people through its schools programme.'

Marie Kirbyshaw, Chief Executive for Luton Culture said, 'This is another great funding success story for the trust, we intend to grow from strength to strength'.

The trust will be investing in digital resources to enable researchers, students, local people, other museums and a broader national and international audience access to important collections; it also has an ambition for its significant Hat and Headwear collection to become the UK's and the world's, foremost resource on the Hat Industry and Headwear.

If you would like to find out more about Museum Makers please visit www.museummakers.co.uk or pop into Wardown House, Museum and Gallery, Old Bedford Road, Luton, LU2 7HA.

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Notes to editor

About Luton Culture

Luton Culture is an arts and culture charity which runs Wardown House, Museum and Gallery, Stockwood Discovery Centre, The Hat Factory Arts Centre, Luton's Library Theatre, Luton Libraries and some community centres. Luton Culture aims to provide high quality arts and culture experiences, to engage and inspire audiences and grow local arts and cultural talent.

Luton Culture has a significant impact on the economic development of Luton. The Association of Independent Museums Economic Value of Museums Toolkit has estimated the annual financial impact of tourism to Wardown House, Museum and Gallery is over £2m.

www.lutonculture.com

More about the impact of the Award

This will enable Luton Culture to develop excellence in their collections, improve displays and share their resources to the widest possible audiences. The evolution of *Museum Makers* will see it continue engagement through challenges and targeted projects. Now that the future of the Museum

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has been secured by the recent redevelopment, *Museum Makers* have an exciting opportunity to help expand the collection and get more local people involved in this fascinating heritage site.

About Arts Council England (ACE)

ACE champion, develop and invest in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. They support activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.

Between 2015 and 2018, they will invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and an estimated £700 million from the National Lottery to help create art and culture experiences for everyone, everywhere.

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

About Luton

Luton is a town with significant areas of deprivation. Luton is a plural town with a population of 214,700 (Luton 2015 Mid-Year Population Estimate, LBC Business Intelligence). Four areas, including the High Town Ward, where Wardown House, Museum and Gallery sits, feature in the top 10% most deprived areas in England and Wales on the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Research undertaken through the Active People survey in 2010, found that just 35% of Luton's population engage or participate in cultural or heritage activity, placing the town in the bottom 20% of least culturally engaged places in the UK. This statistic, and the fact that there are no longer any organisations in the town who receive regular funding from *Arts Council England (ACE)*, has led to Luton being a priority place for ACE investment programmes. In November 2016 the *Royal Society for the Arts (RSA)* listed Luton as the second worst town (325th) for heritage, assets and areas of natural beauty. *Heritage Lottery Fund* has identified Luton as a priority development area.

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ⁱ The Guinness World Record for most amount of people gathered wearing a Straw Boater in 2014