Flax Mill Maltings: The Project

A new future of creativity, innovation and partnership working drives the third incarnation of the Flax Mill Maltings

The world’s first iron framed building can be found at The Flax Mill Maltings in Shrewsbury. It’s a mill of extraordinary historic importance that changed the way we live and work today, despite this, the buildings have stood derelict for over thirty years. Now funding has been secured by a unique public partnership to transform the heritage site into a visitor attraction as well as a place for learning, workspaces and community use.

“It is one of those rare structures that changed the world of construction and design. With its revolutionary iron frame it was the predecessor of the modern skyscraper.” Sir Neil Cossons, the UK’s leading authority on Industrial Heritage.

Taking the cue from the innovation and entrepreneurial energy that created this first ever fire-proof factory, the project to refurbish the buildings aspires to be an exemplar heritage-led regeneration scheme. This will be achieved through the design quality, environmental standards it will achieve, its community engagement and the location of the site combined with the unique way the partnership has been formed and will continue to operate.

The project’s aim is to preserve historic features and combine these with contemporary design and modern environmental credentials. It will not only attract international and enthusiast audiences for its historical claim, but will also encourage the people of Shrewsbury and its visitors to appreciate and celebrate this heritage as part of the wider Shropshire story. Within 5 years it is estimated the Flax Mill Maltings will attract 100,000 visitors per annum, adding to the 3.8 million visitors who visit Shrewsbury each year.

“The project will combine heritage, culture, community and commerce to create an inspirational place in which a vibrant community can co-exist,” explains The Flax Mill Maltings Project Manager, Elizabeth Perkins “It will transform attitudes towards the local area, improve the local environment and increase employment and skills.

She continues, “The Flax Mill Maltings has always been a place of energy, activity, innovation and partnership working and these qualities will be evidence again as the historic buildings are brought back to life for their third century of industrious use.”

By restoring seven important heritage buildings the project will:

- Provide high quality workspaces for around 300 people within the listed buildings, with informal break-out areas for networking and well equipped conference facilities.
• Open up the massive volume of space within the Kiln to its full height to create a spectacular entrance and circulation space for visitors and tenants.

• Encourage public visitors by transforming the ground floor of the Main Mill to tell the remarkable history of the Flax Mill Maltings. Visitors will be able to see the building in its original form and through innovative interpretation discover the stories of the mill from its first use as a Flax Mill, through its transformation to a Maltings and the social history of the people who created the buildings and worked and lived here.

• Develop a café and catering offer within the Dye House that will provide visitors, tenants and the local community with affordable and interesting food that links with and celebrates local producers.

• Deliver a high quality outreach and on site education programme with opportunities for all from early years through to adults to learn from and be inspired by the Flax Mill Maltings, its heritage and redevelopment.

• Encourage public participation through tours, events, activities, exhibitions, pop ups, markets and music. We will utilise the facilities within the Dye house, Main Mill, Jubilee Tower and external landscape to allow people to explore and engage with the Flax Mill Maltings.

• Learning from the award winning play centre at the National Building Museum in Washington USA, which enables children to learn through play by creating their own structures and buildings. We will create an educational architectural soft play area based on this principle.

• The Dye House, with its spectacular light-weight roof and vast spaces, will be transformed into a space for public engagement. The building will house a café, education and activity rooms, soft play and open exhibition and events space.

• Deliver 20 new accredited apprenticeships, 175 training opportunities and 200 professional development opportunities, over 285 training opportunities for Friends volunteers and board members and 5,200 days of volunteer activity will be supported.

• Offer high quality landscaped areas with interpretation about the site and its history: rain gardens, benches and planting, all designed to enhance the context of the important historic buildings and encourage the public to enjoy the wider site.

This project is the first phase of a wider Master Plan that will unlock the potential of the wider site and kick start a transformation of the area. The Main Mill, Kiln and Dye House will anchor a site presence as well as acting as an essential catalyst for the remaining delivery of the site.
Explaining more about the partnership Mal Price, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet member for built environment, said: “Through a revolutionary collaboration, the partners have been working closely together on plans to develop the Flax Mill Maltings site, and to secure funding for the project. The project is unique as - in the absence of a private sector partner - the public sector has been playing the role of developer, and the success of our partnership means this is a model that I’m sure many other public bodies will follow in the future.”

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