



Major grant will help preserve Hebden Bridge's heritage signal box **6 July 2021**

Hebden Bridge's Victorian signal box, disused since 2018, is set to be looked after as a community-run heritage feature for the town. Locally based charitable trust Calder Valley Community Land Trust has received the news that it is to receive a £99,600 grant from the The National Lottery Heritage Fund for an innovative project focused on preserving the building and creating a heritage centre.

The signal box dates back to the days of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, and still has the original L&Y signal lever frame in place where it was installed in 1891. The building has been empty since the signalling was modernised in 2018 and has suffered low-level vandalism. The importance of the building has been recognised in the grade II listing which it has received from Historic England.

The grant follows three years of work by the Community Land Trust, in partnership with the Friends of Hebden Bridge Station, to find a sustainable future for the signal box under community ownership.

Simon Brearley, Chair of Calder Valley Community Land Trust, said: "The funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund is fantastic news. We now have almost all the pieces together for the project to go ahead. This will be a heritage building which, we believe, will attract interest not just from Calderdale but from across the whole of the north of England."

Under the proposals, Calder Valley Community Land Trust will oversee the restoration of the interior of the box. Among other things, a computer simulation will

be installed, allowing visitors the virtual experience of using the existing signal levers to 'take' a 'train' through the Hebden Bridge section of track.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund are also supporting the appointment of a Project Officer who will work with local people, including schools and youth organisations, to enable visitors to better understand the importance of the signal box's heritage. A series of oral history recordings will be made of the experiences of former signal operators. The ground floor of the box will be adapted, available for visitors looking for quirky overnight accommodation. Income from paying guests will help to fund maintenance of the fabric of the box.

David Renwick, Director, England, North at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "Railway heritage in the North is not only significant locally but for the wider region, and the preservation of the Hebden Bridge signal box will highlight important history for the community. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, we are proud to support Calder Valley Community Land Trust in this innovative project, that sees our industrial heritage celebrated in a new fashion that also creates an interesting and commercially sustainable future for the Grade II listed signal box."

The venture to preserve Hebden Bridge Signal Box has already attracted the support of the Railway Heritage Trust and an early £4,500 grant from Hebden Royd Town Council has enabled the CLT to commission local architect Jacquie Milham of Architectonic Design to prepare the necessary drawings. With the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway a short distance away it will make this part of West Yorkshire an even more popular destination for railway heritage enthusiasts.

Network Rail have said that they are highly supportive of the principle of a leasehold transfer of the building to the CLT and discussions are now taking place over the details of the transfer.

Dale Clarke, Property Services Manager for Network Rail, said: "We are delighted to be working with Calder Valley Community Land Trust to preserve the historic signal box. This funding is a huge step towards a heritage project which will allow the

Grade II listed building to be enjoyed by people in the community as well as visitors to Hebden Bridge for years to come.

“As we continue to improve the railway and upgrade the signalling system to bring more reliable journeys for passengers, it’s great that people will be able to learn more about the history of the railway in the area.”

Calder Valley Community Land Trust is a charitable community benefit society, with over 250 members. It is already the legal custodian of the Fielden Hall in Todmorden, a grade II heritage building, and recently raised community share capital to buy the adjacent land and buildings. It is also concerned to meet local housing needs by bringing new affordable homes to rent to the upper Calder Valley. Its first development, of six bungalows for independent living in later life, was completed in Walsden last year.