

PRESS RELEASE
March 2020

HRH THE COUNTESS OF WESSEX TO VISIT COMMUNITY HUB IN LEEDS

The Old Fire Station in Gipton will welcome special guest Her Royal Highness **The Countess of Wessex** on **Wednesday 11th March 2020** to meet those involved in the renovated centre at the heart of the East Leeds community.

The Old Fire Station was purchased and transformed into a fantastic multipurpose hub in 2017 with a £3million grant from Jimbo's Fund (the late Jimi Heselden's legacy) managed by **Leeds Community Foundation**. The thriving centre is at the heart of East Leeds, bringing local people and the community, volunteer organisations and charities together.

Her Royal Highness will be meeting the team behind **The Old Fire Station** along with members of the Heselden family and **Leeds Community Foundation**, CEO, Kate Hainsworth. The Countess will also meet representatives from six charities, a cookery school and a café who reside in the building including: Leeds Cookery School, GIPSIL, Space2, Zest, Healthwatch Leeds, People in Action, SLATE and the Safari Club's Creche.

The event will culminate with The Countess unveiling a plaque in the memory of the late Pam Leighton who passed away suddenly in September 2019. Pam was an integral part of the **Leeds Eastern Fire Heritage Group** who have worked with Space2 to curate a museum of memorabilia around the history of The Old Fire Station which dates back to 1937.

Fran Etherington, Development Manager at **The Old Fire Station** says *"We are delighted to welcome Her Royal Highness here at The Old Fire Station. The Countess's visit means the world to the local community and is a great recognition of the impact this fantastic project has had in the area and the hard work that the team have put into achieving this. To be able to showcase all the wonderful activities that go on in the building – from sewing groups to car boot sales – will be very exciting and we hope The Countess will enjoy her visit to East Leeds"*

Kate Hainsworth, Chief Executive of **Leeds Community Foundation** said *"We are looking forward to welcoming The Countess to one of the Foundation's landmark projects, to see first-hand the transformative*

impact that investment into a building or place can have on the local community. The Old Fire Station has become a fantastic asset at the heart of East Leeds providing a space to work, learn, experience and play and is accessible for all. “

ENDS

Notes to Editor

The Old Fire Station

In 2014, the West Yorkshire Fire Service commissioned a new fire station in Killingbeck and decommissioned their stations in Gipton and Stanks. Two locally based community organisations (GIPSIL and Zest Health for Life) approached Leeds Community Foundation (LCF) to see if it was possible to save the building for the community by converting it into a Community and Enterprise hub.

Leeds Community Foundation managed a significant fund set up by the late Jimi Heselden, a local businessman who was born and brought up in East Leeds. Following discussions with Jimi's family, the Foundation was able to make a grant from Jimbo's Fund to finance the purchase and renovation of the former fire station. Jimi felt passionately about supporting his local community, so this is a very appropriate way of acknowledging his tremendous generosity.

Other third sector partners came on board as potential tenants, and contractors were appointed - Brewster Bye (architects), Aspect 4 (project managers) and Simpson Of York (construction company). The project began to take shape and the renovation was completed in August 2017. - but the building has been transformed into a bright modern hub of activity

Many of the original features have been retained - old pumps, the fireman's poles some flooring and tiles - with the building being transformed into a bright modern hub of activity for all the community to enjoy.

www.theoldfirestationgipton.org.uk

Leeds Community Foundation

Leeds Community Foundation distributes grants, shares advice and uses specialist knowledge to help community projects thrive, so they can make an even greater impact and create opportunities for people to be Healthy and Well, Work and Learn and be Financially well, Thrive and Be Safe, and Experience and Play. Since its inception, Leeds Community Foundation has distributed over £42m and supported hundreds of thousands of people in some of the most deprived communities of Leeds and Bradford.

We work together with partners to create positive change with the communities that need it most, by investing funding and expertise to build a better future now.

In 2018/2019, we distributed £4.1m in grants across Leeds and Bradford: supporting 634 projects and over 59,000 people. We aim to continue to provide cities of opportunity for all and ensure everyone has access to opportunities that will help them to thrive.

www.leedscf.org.uk

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