

## **Preston Tower Project**

Preston Tower is one of the major Heritage Investment Projects in Prestonpans just now and aims to consolidate and undertake stonemasonry repairs to the Tower, repairs to the Doocot and repairs to the garden walls as well as improving the gardens with new paths and planting.

The Tower buildings and the garden area are all owned by the National Trust for Scotland, but the work is being organised by East Lothian Council who has maintenance responsibility for the area. The project team is working with the Council, The National Trust for Scotland and the community. We also have to work with Historic Environment Scotland because the whole area is a scheduled ancient monument and it needs their permission before any maintenance work can be undertaken.

The project as a whole is being funded by the Scottish Government through the Town Centre Regeneration Fund and is expected to cost approximately £1,000,000. The Town Centre Regeneration Fund has awarded this money on the basis that it believes that the work will help to regenerate both the town centre and the town as a whole.

Work started with the Preston Seton and Gosford Area Partnership's funding for a conditions survey of the buildings which was undertaken by Groves-Raines Architects. They are specialist conservation architects. That work underlined the extent of work required and gave an indicative budget cost including for improving public access to the tower by way of a possible new outside staircase.

After the award of funding a project team was appointed led by Groves-Raines and has been busy in all of the proprietary work including the required ecological surveys and as it is a scheduled monument the necessary scheduled monument consent applications.

To satisfy the grant requirements a competitive tendering process had to be completed and this has been satisfactorily undertaken with the successful contractor being Campbell and Smith of Ormiston, a local firm, to do the works at a cost of £690,000 approximately

Results from the ecological surveys coupled with the grant restrictions indicated that the work would have to be planned and undertaken in two phases to avoid disturbing wildlife and to ensure compliance with the grant conditions.

Phase one includes archaeological investigations, further statutory consents and enabling work for the project as well as the garden wall repairs, the Doocot repairs, some of the interpretation works and will start shortly, completing in September this year.

Phase two work will include work to the tower itself including the installation of a new stair and feature architectural lighting, improving on the old lighting system that some might recall from the late 1990's.

The project team has been preparing for the project as a whole though, including all the phase two works and a decision on the funding for phase two is expected shortly.

The next step for the project will be for the newly appointed Interpretation Consultants, Lyndsey Clark and Steve McCluskey, to hold community discussions to establish the local stories that are associated with the tower in living memory as well as establishing how the tower and surrounding area have been used in its near 600 hundred year history. They'll then recommend how it can be best be used by the community and visitors in future so everybody can understand what has been going on in terms of how people lived in the tower and surrounding area and indeed inside the tower area.

It is an exciting £1,000,000 project for the town and the Council wants to see each of the 3 major projects, The Museum, the War Memorial Square and the Tower linked together in future by way of interpretation signage and the town trail route as well as information for visitors that arrive by train and car or on foot along the John Muir Way, all designed to encourage more people to discover the fascinating history and heritage of the Tower and the town as a whole.

Throughout the project we will be trying to encourage as many learning and training opportunities as possible. There will be regular updates on how work is progressing and the contractors will be undertaking some educational work showing people how they go about doing their stone replacement and line pointing techniques and we're looking to see if there can be some opportunities for training for particularly for youngsters as part of the overall project although that aspect has not yet been confirmed.