

Action Party awarded £647,500 from Scottish Land Fund



The Portobello residents who want to buy the former Portobello Parish Church and halls in Bellfield Street are celebrating today. They are a little closer to making the dream a reality with a grant from the Scottish Land Fund. Theirs was the biggest award among 11 projects across the country.

The £647,500 will help them acquire and develop the property using the terms of the Community Empowerment Act to do so. This legislation allows urban communities to gain the right to buy in certain circumstances.

The plan is to convert the buildings into a community hub which can then be used for meetings or a variety of purposes. It will allow a valuable building to be brought back into use for all in the community.

Welcoming the news, Action Party Chair, Justin Kenrick, said: "With the community fully behind this initiative to save Bellfield Old Parish Church and halls, Action Party is now absolutely delighted to receive this crucial support from the Scottish Land Fund. As the population of Portobello grows while community resources vanish, this is a critical step in ensuring that we retain and develop fully accessible, affordable community spaces that can enable our community to flourish in these changing times. We hope that all other communities will do the same, and will also get the support they deserve."

Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "I am delighted to see that the Scottish Land Fund has awarded Action Party over £600,000 towards their purchase of the church and halls.

"This is the first group to go through the revised Community Right to Buy legislation, which now allows urban groups to apply. I'm keen to see more urban groups take advantage of the opportunities that the extended legislation offers and I'm

encouraged to see that the Land Fund is supporting the group to achieve their aims and ambitions.”

Ash Denham, MSP for Edinburgh Eastern, congratulated Action Party and said: “I am so pleased that Action Party has received funding from the Scottish Land Fund, which will help the group to redevelop and transform the Portobello Old Parish Church into an incredible resource and community-centric space.

“Groups like Action Party exemplify what land reform is all about – taking control of land that really matters to a community and making smart and powerful changes to it that will benefit that community’s vitality. I offer Action Party my congratulations on all the work they have done thus far, and look forward to seeing their community-led transformations take root in Portobello.”

Lothian Conservative MSP Miles Briggs, who joined local campaigners for the launch of their campaign at Bellfield last year, said: “I warmly congratulate Action Party on securing this substantial grant from the Scottish Land Fund which I hope will be a major step towards allowing it to move ahead and purchase the Portobello Old Parish Church and Halls for the community.

“ Bellfield is a fantastic location and the group’s plans for a community hub are positive and ambitious and enjoy very significant local support.

“ This land fund award is a real boost for the Portobello community and I pay tribute to all involved in Action Party and the Save Bellfield campaign for the hard work they have put in to get to this stage. I wish them every success as they aim to take forward the purchase of the site and its redevelopment.”

The Scottish Government’s draft budget for 2017 – 2018 includes £10 million for the Land Fund and an additional £3.4 million for other land reform measures. This will enable the

Scottish Government to implement the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, including establishing the Scottish Land Commission from 1 April 2017

The other 11 projects included in this round of funding cover the country from West Dunbartonshire to Iona and Orkney. In total The Scottish Government has awarded £2.1m at this time to help local groups purchase land for their communities.

The Scottish Land Fund is keen to support more applications from across Scotland and particularly within urban areas. Groups considering applying should contact the Big Lottery Fund to discuss their idea at advicescotland@biglotteryfund.org.uk or by phoning 0300 123 7110.