

Old Fire Station moving forward for opening

The Old Fire Station, which will be home to two independent organisations who will operate and work alongside each other to create a centre for creativity, skills development and enterprise for people in Oxford, is moving towards its opening later this year.

The two organisations, Crisis and Arts at the Old Fire Station, have shown representatives from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which provided £2.8m to support the project around the building.

The tour showed the HCA delegates the work that has taken place so far and what the new building will look like.

The building will house Crisis Skylight, an education, training and employment centre for people who are homeless, have been homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It will also run a social enterprise Crisis Skylight Café. Arts at the Old Fire Station, which is an independent arts charity, will also be housed in the building and will look to develop partnership projects with Crisis clients. It will also offer professional development for artists, creative activities for the general public, a shop selling the work of local artists and music, dance, theatre, and art exhibitions for the public.

The project is supported by Oxford City Council who is working with Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people, after funding was awarded from the Government's Places of Change Programme.

The building is being re-developed by Kingerlee, which is based in Kidlington, who started work on the project at the beginning of this year.

Councillor Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council, says: "We were delighted to welcome representatives from the Homes and Communities Agency and show them how their money is being spent.

"The 'two organisations, one building' model, is a new development for Crisis not yet offered in Skylight Centres but one which we believe offers huge potential for collaboration across communities in the city."

Leslie Morphy, Chief Executive of Crisis, says: "This project is making great progress and Crisis is really looking forward to extending our support for homeless people to the city of Oxford, we are confident that the Old Fire Station will be an inspiring and ground breaking project."

Richard Cunningham, Programme Manager at the HCA, says: "We're delighted at the progress being made at the Old Fire station.

"This project represents a significant development in the provision of services for homeless and vulnerable people in Oxford, breaking down social barriers

by creating a space where they will have access to new opportunities but which will have real relevance to the wider community as well."

Jeremy Spafford, Director of Arts at the Old Fire Station, says: "We will be creating a home for artists of all backgrounds to make and showcase work and to use art and creativity to build the skills and confidence of vulnerable people.

"We also want to offer Oxford's residents and visitors a great new venue in the heart of the city."

Paul Hardy, Construction Director for Kingerlee, says: "The works programme on site is progressing at a significant pace. It will be a great achievement when the refurbishment works are complete. It has been a long time since Kingerlee built the original Fire Station in 1896."

A programme of training courses, arts projects, dance classes, art exhibitions, tailored employment programmes will be run at The Old Fire Station.

The new centre is due to open in autumn this year.

The Old Fire Station opened as a working fire station in 1896 and remained the main fire station until 1971.

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NOTE TO EDITORS

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) is the single, national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England. Its role is to create opportunity for people to live in high quality, sustainable places. It provides funding for affordable housing, bring land back into productive use and improve quality of life by raising standards for the physical and social environment. For more information visit www.homesandcommunities.co.uk

Places of Change is an £80m capital improvement funding programme managed by the Homes and Communities Agency, which seeks to improve services for people who are homeless. It aims to identify, encourage, engage and release their potential to enable them to move on with their lives. It encourages service users to get involved in services that will help them turn their lives around. For more information visit www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/places_of_change