

Community Group receives funding for first step in potential NHS asset transfer of iconic Astley Ainslie Hospital ground in South Edinburgh

The Astley Ainslie Community Trust (AACT), a local community group in South Edinburgh, received a boost for their campaign to negotiate community ownership of the iconic Astley Ainslie Hospital ground in Morningside. On Wednesday 21st November it was announced that they were awarded a grant of nearly £12,000 from the Scottish Government's 'Making Places Initiative' for community-led design.

Robin Harper OBE, Convener of AACT said "These funds will help us give local people in South Edinburgh the opportunity to create a community vision for the Astley Ainslie site and how it should be developed. Astley Ainslie is an oasis of green in South Edinburgh, owned by the people of Scotland since the NHS took possession of the site in 1940s, and we want it to continue as a space that provides health and wellbeing benefits for the people of Edinburgh".

AACT is a new community organisation, formed by local residents who believe that the Astley Ainslie site should be owned by and managed on behalf of Edinburgh's people. AACT are working with NHS Lothian, City of Edinburgh Council and other local groups to explore the potential for community-led development, taking advantage of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and building on the models of community involvement, control and ownership trail-blazed in Portobello by community groups Action Party and Action Westbank. They will holding a series of engagement and visioning events in early 2019.

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Notes to Editors

The Astley Ainslie Hospital, November 2018

The Astley Ainslie Hospital occupies ground at the heart of south Edinburgh. The land is an open, sunny slope, looking out to the hills. It has a historic relationship with health. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was part of the common land of the city. During virulent attacks of the plague, the sick were brought out here to the chapel of St Roque, the patron saint of plague victims. The dead were buried around the chapel, now an archaeological site. The Chapel was demolished in the late 18th century, and the land became rich and productive, successfully feeding Edinburgh. By the mid century, villas and cottages were built with large gardens. The people living here included the surgeon, Professor James Syme, who had a garden filled with exotic plants, with pineapples, figs, grapes, oranges and bananas. The owners planted trees from around the world alongside native species. An official count (City of Edinburgh Tree Preservation Order, No. 3 2000) numbered nearly 2,000 trees.

In the later 19th century, David Ainslie, worked as an East Lothian farmer. He died in 1900, a wealthy man, with considerable shares in international railway stock. Fifteen years' investment ensured an impressive sum to founding 'Astley Ainslie Institution' for convalescents. This was a memorial for his nephew, John Astley Ainslie 'to whom he was deeply attached'. The First World War intervening, it was not until 21 years after David Ainslie's death that his Trustees established his convalescent

hospital with gardens and recreation grounds (David Ainslie's testament, Scottish Record Office SCOO7000001-00).

By the end of the 1920s, the Astley Ainslie Hospital had built pavilions with verandahs so that the patients could remain in the open air in all states of the weather. The trustees built a block for research, radiotherapy installations, and gymnastics. They provided mobile patients with open-air shelters, with bowls, croquet and clock golf. The grounds were laid out by the Royal Botanic Gardens, with exotic seeds and plants, and a vegetable garden. N.B. The Infirmary patients, who came to the Institution to recover their health, were principally the workers and the poor. Post war, when the National Health Service took on the hospital and its functions, they were impressed by the AA endowment, and allocated a large portion to research into the convalescence and rehabilitation.

The hospital has taken a dynamic role in convalescence, serious injuries and disablement. After the war, they built the school and the Charles Bell pavilion for children. Older people were cared for with the Balfour Pavilion, and the Smart Centre, for mobility and rehabilitation technology, opened in 2007. The Astley Ainslie combines sophisticated knowledge of both physical and mental disablement, and its research has produced major improvements in the field – including 'The Heart Manual' on coronary disease.

Current plans

The Astley Ainslie is the last convalescent hospital in Scotland. The NHS are now building on the Royal Edinburgh site, and are disposing of the land at the Astley Ainslie.

The Astley Ainslie Community Trust was set up in 2018 by local residents, who propose a Community Asset Transfer under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to keep the land in public hands, for our health and our happiness. (See website for further information www.aact.scot).

Scottish Government Making Places Initiative

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/making-places-initiative-2018-2018-prospectus-and-application-form/>

From the prospectus:

"Since 2011... The programme has encouraged communities to actively and positively take part in developing ideas for the future of their towns, villages and neighbourhoods. The Making Places initiative offers funding for communities, public sector organisations and third sector groups to come together, talk about the issues in their local areas, and develop plans and design for the future. Making Places can provide support to communities who are keen to take the first step in discussing issues in their local area to those who are ready to have a more detailed conversation and to design and develop a vision for the future."

Awardees:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/list-of-community-led-design-projects-funded-through-making-places-initiative-2018-19/>