

EMBARGO: 8 October 2015

New chapter for Dragon Hall as Mayor hands keys to Writers' Centre Norwich

This evening, the Lord Mayor of Norwich, Councillor Brenda Arthur will formally hand Writers' Centre Norwich the keys to Dragon Hall. During the civic ceremony the Mayor will thank the Norfolk and Norwich Heritage Trust for their 25 year custodianship and transformation of the medieval trading hall and welcome the Writers' Centre to their new home.

The keys will be presented to David Gilbert, the incoming Chair of Writers' Centre Norwich, who will be confirmed in post this evening. Gilbert is a former MD of Waterstones Booksellers Ltd and an alumnus of the University of East Anglia. He will share his exciting vision to create a National Centre for Writing at Dragon Hall to open in 2017. This will be a major new cultural venue for the city; for local residents to enjoy as well as attracting national and international visitors, to the benefit of our local shops, restaurants and hotels.

David Gilbert says:

"I fell in love with Norwich as a student at UEA. I look forward to working with the amazing team at WCN to create something truly inspiring for Norwich and Norfolk. The National Centre for Writing will provide a space for local school pupils and world-renowned Nobel prize winners alike. I'm delighted to be able to share experience from my career in business to such an exciting and worthwhile endeavour. This is something for the whole city to get excited about".

Alan Waters, Leader of Norwich City Council , Norwich City Council, says:

"Dragon Hall will provide a fitting home for Norwich's UNESCO City of Literature status. This prestigious building will help the Writers Centre attract national and international investment. In time the development of this venue as focus for reading and writing will mean it be a major contributor to Norwich's cultural offering".

Antonia Byatt, Director, South East and Literature, Arts Council England, says:

“This is exciting time in the development of Writers’ Centre Norwich. The move to Dragon Hall will support its ambitions to be a major centre for writing in the UNESCO City of Literature, supporting writers, readers and translators. We look forward to seeing Writers’ Centre Norwich use this as a platform to expand opportunities for people to become inspired by literature, particularly children and young people, and to reach new audiences locally, nationally and internationally.”

The Writers’ Centre is already running a year-round public programme of live-events, courses and workshops at Dragon Hall. In addition it will be announced this evening that Dragon Hall will soon be open for free Heritage Tours for those interested in the fascinating history of one of Europe’s most unique civic buildings. For details contact: info@writerscentrenorwich.org.uk

In the run-up to 2017 and opening as a National Centre for Writing, WCN will continue its fund-raising campaign in order to develop the already approved South Wing as an education space. This will enable the organisation to work with school pupils across the city and county to share the 1,000 year history of Dragon Hall and inspire children to create their own stories.

Funding is also sought for renovation work on the building’s infrastructure to secure Dragon Hall’s long term future for the city, its residents and visitors. **/ENDS**

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. For further information and photographs please contact Alice Kent, Director of Communications, Writers Centre Norwich, alice.kent@writerscentrenorwich.org.uk / 01603 877177

2. Writers’ Centre Norwich Writers’ Centre Norwich is the literature development agency for the East and led the successful bid to have Norwich nominated as England’s first (and only) UNESCO City of Literature, one of just eleven in the world. WCN is a National Portfolio Organisation supporting by Arts Council England. WCN supports emerging and established writers and seeks to explore the artistic and social power of creative writing through pioneering and collaborative projects with writers, readers, schools, libraries and cultural partners. Its programme includes mentoring, workshops, conferences, live literature events and talks by internationally acclaimed writers. Speakers at WCN events in recent years have included Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson and JM Coetzee.

3. The Norfolk and Norwich Heritage Trust The Norfolk and Norwich Heritage Trust was established in 1987 to conserve and care for Dragon Hall and to promote the use of the building for educational purposes. After an independent consultant report, the Trust decided that the long-term future of the building required a new tenant. The Writers’ Centre took over the lease of Dragon Hall on April 1 2015.

4. Dragon Hall Dragon Hall is a unique, Grade 1 listed medieval trading hall dating from around 1430, renowned for its spectacular timber crown-post roof and intricately carved and painted dragon.. For centuries the original timber roof and vast Great Hall were lost, concealed within an everyday terrace of houses and shops. Today, the Great Hall has been restored to its original splendour, telling the remarkable story of Robert Toppes, medieval trade and civic life in fifteenth century Norwich. The building is owned by Norwich City Council and from April 1 2015 will be leased to Writers Centre Norwich.