

# HARTLEBURY CASTLE PRESERVATION TRUST

*Committed to Preserving Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library*

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## Press Release

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2010

Immediate Release

### OPTION AGREEMENT OFF

#### TRUST NEEDS TO RAISE £2.5 MILLION – STARTING NOW!

The Church of England is disposing of historic Hartlebury Castle, which is surplus to their requirements. For the past year Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, formed to try to save the Castle from sale into private or commercial ownership, has been negotiating with the Church Commissioners to try to acquire the Castle for public benefit, to preserve the 1100 year heritage of the site, to keep the Hurd Library in situ and to protect the property for the future benefit of all.

In October 2009, the Trust announced that the Church Commissioners had offered them a two-year option to buy, which was accepted in principle. However, as the details of the arrangement emerged through a long period of negotiation, it became clear that the conditions attached to the option and the asking price made it unrealistic for the Trust to accept.

From the Trust perspective, the objective is to use a combination of grant funding from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund together with donations to facilitate the acquisition. In applying for grant funding, the Trust must ensure that it meets the eligibility criteria of the funding body. Unfortunately, the Trust could not reconcile the option price and its associated restrictions with the funding organisations. Through the negotiation process it became evident that unless the Church Commissioners were prepared to relax their requirements the only viable option which met the funding criteria was an unrestricted sale on the open market. Therefore, the Trust had to decline the option.

The Trust recognises that competition on the open market exposes the Trust to a significant risk of failure as a result of being out-bid. However, they still believe they are the only credible option.

As a result of this decision, the Church Commissioners have generously offered to refrain from putting the property on the open market for a period of two years, at which point it will be offered for sale to the highest credible bidder. They are co-operating further with the Trust by allowing them use of the Castle for fund-raising purposes. This gives the Trust two years in which to try to raise the funds to compete on the open market. There are benefits and disadvantages for the Trust in this solution, all of which have been taken

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Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust

[www.hartleburycastletrust.org](http://www.hartleburycastletrust.org)

Registered Company No.6779241

Registered Charity No. 1127871

Registered Office Address: Greenacres, Narroway Lane,

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carefully into account during the decision making process. The Trust believes that during the two-year period they will make substantial steps forward and do not intend to close the door to an off-market acquisition should the opportunity and appropriate conditions arise.

The Trust counts amongst its supporters English Heritage, The National Trust, The Georgian Group, The Architectural Heritage Fund, the Development Trust Association Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust, The Friends of Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, local Civic Societies and Councils, Lord Faulkner, Lord Sandys, the Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire and local MPs. The Trustees are grateful for the wealth of advice offered by these and other interested organisations together with the support of hundreds of individuals.

The Trust remains committed to fighting to save the property from sale into the commercial or private sector. Its campaign to this point has been low key to ensure the best climate for the sensitive negotiations with the Church Commissioners. Now they intend to launch a vigorous awareness campaign and a major fund-raising effort. Not only do they need to raise the money to purchase the property, they have estimated the need for significant spending on repairs and restorative work required to put right the building and grounds if they are successful in purchasing it. They have set themselves a target to raise at least £2.5 million pounds in the 2-year period. If they are unsuccessful it is unlikely that they will be in a position to submit a bid for the property.

The Trust's goal, after acquisition, is to ensure public access to the Castle and gardens, to carry out restoration projects on the sadly neglected grounds and to provide opportunities for community, educational and cultural activities at this beautiful place which has 1100 years of history at its heart.

Chairman of the Trust, Sue Beeson says:

*"The time has come to support the hard working team of volunteers that has brought us this far, by engaging some professional support. The challenge facing us is monumental but do-able if we can capitalise our support and mobilise the community of Worcestershire and beyond. The Trust is grateful to the Commissioners for their willingness to seek a solution that involves the Trust and recognises that their duty to get the best price possible for the property conflicts with its own duty to try to protect it for public benefit within the constraints of charity funding. Now is the time for the people of Worcestershire to rally round the Trust and show that they care enough about saving Hartlebury Castle to get involved. If they don't, then it is almost certain that the Castle will be sold to a commercial or private buyer and lost to the public for ever."*

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## Forthcoming Events

### Supporters Meeting

Monday 24th May 7.30 p.m

The Trust is holding a meeting for their supporters, at the Castle. Anyone interested in finding out more about the Trust's plans or wishing to become involved will receive a warm welcome. An immediate priority is to recruit more volunteers and to raise funds to engage some professionals in roles relating to PR and project management.

### Songs from the Shows and Pig-Roast

Friday 28th May 7.30 p.m

### Regency Music Evening with DoDici Corde

Saturday 29th May 7.30 p.m

### Trust and Friends Annual Garden Party

Saturday 19th June 1.30-4.30 p.m

To find out more about the work of the Trust, its intentions, events and progress visit the web-site [www.hartleburycastletrust.org](http://www.hartleburycastletrust.org) and follow @castlebod on twitter.

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