
P R E S S R E L E A S E

REVITALISATION OF THE MARKET SQUARE IN LAUFFEN TO COMMENCE

Sale of “Lauffen 15” approved by local council with a large majority

München/ Lauffen, 1 October 2020

The former poorhouse on the market square in Lauffen, known as Lauffen 15, has seen better days. Built in the 16th century for a wealthy salt merchant from Lauffen, it has always shaped the centre of the oldest market in the Salzkammergut area. At times it even housed the market jurisdiction. When salt manufacturing, i.e. the monopolised salt trade came to a standstill in the mid-19th century, the building also lost its significance. It only reopened

in 1862 with a new purpose: According to its charter, the hospital foundation of Empress Elisabeth offered accommodation and protection here for the “homeless poor”. In 1864 a children's institution was added. With the fall of the monarchy, the foundation continued to exist until it was finally dissolved in 1939 but it was not until 1965 that operations stopped completely. The building has stood empty since then.



*The property on Lauffen's market square that shapes the townscape.
Picture credit: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE PROJECT*



*The ruinous state of the building is already visible from the outside.
Picture credit: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE PROJECT*

Even to maintain this sad state of affairs, the city of Ischl however had to invest thousands of euros every year. For decades this repeatedly led to considerations about using the building for new purposes or selling it, but thus far always in vain.

Most recently, intentions of setting up the Ischl saltworks archive there failed due to the lack of funding from the EU. The collection will now move to the Lehár-Stöckl in Ischl..

This presented a new opportunity for the historic walls as well as for the entire market centre of Lauffen. The European Heritage Project, an initiative founded by

the German entrepreneur Prof. Dr. Dr. Peter Löw and his wife Mag. Clara Löw who was born in Lauffen, not only attempted to purchase the poor house but also bought two other empty and dilapidated salt merchant houses in Lauffen. The European Heritage Project, which already looks back on an impressive number of successful renovations of palaces, monasteries and castles, including two Venetian palazzi on the Grand Canal, recently gained experience in the restoration of inner-city ensembles by restoring eight monuments in the spa town of Baden-Baden, which has just applied for the title of World Heritage Site. Only last week the local mayor Margret Mergen praised the commitment of The



The former mountain court in the old town of Kitzbühel at the time of acquisition by the European Heritage Project.

Picture credit: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE PROJECT

European Heritage Project at a topping-out ceremony for one of the projects. In Kitzbühel the dilapidated 16th century Berggericht and a 17th century merchant's house, both in front of the square of the Saint Catherine's Church in the pedestrian zone, are also being restored, much to the delight of Mayor Dr. Klaus Winkler. Completion is planned for the end of the year.



The former mountain court after completion of extensive redevelopment and restoration work.

Picture credit: THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE PROJECT

The acquisition of the poorhouse in Lauffen may be the starting signal for a similar development. However, this was preceded by a history that was not always easy. There had already been advanced talks with the erstwhile mayor Hannes Heide in 2019 which then came to a standstill with the change of office. In April 2020, the project was presented to the parliamentary group leaders. In May 2020, Clara and Peter Löw presented the project to the citizens of Lauffen in the congress house in Bad Ischl, where almost 200 Lauffen residents could ask questions. At the beginning of July 2020, a citizens' survey by the city of Lauffen resulted in overwhelming approval. Out of 155 votes cast, 109 were in favour of the project, a majority of almost 70% - every politician's dream. Finally, the local council approved the sale of Lauffen 15 to The European Heritage Project with 28 votes in favour, 3 abstentions and 6 votes against. Only the FPÖ parliamentary group criticised the late release of the purchase contract draft by the administration and either voted against the submission or abstained. The project itself is however supported, according to parliamentary group chairman Norbert Schartner (FPÖ).

Where do we go from here? Löw considers it unlikely that there will be major renovations this year. "The cold season is starting and it will certainly take some time for the property rights to be entered into the land register. What we can already do, however, is to carry out a comprehensive assessment together with the office for the protection of historical monuments and, based on the assessment, develop a plan of action." There have already been discussions with Petra Weiss, head of the Federal Monuments Office, Upper Austria Department, where the development is viewed positively.

If all goes well, Löw says he would like to start construction work in spring 2021 whereby the duration of the approval processes, the high capacity utilisation of the construction companies and the infection situation also play a role. Löw would like to work closely with both the monument protection authorities as well as the local history association of Ischl. "A project like this needs many shoulders," says Löw.

The city of Ischl now also carries responsibility. In the citizen survey initiated by the city itself, not only the sale of Lauffen 15, but also a comprehensive local development concept was voted on with more than a two-thirds majority. The aim is to calm the town centre and to expedite the renovation of the buildings on the market square. A noise protection wall is also planned behind the church "Maria im Schatten". It is the vision of The European Heritage Project to revive the old marketplace with market activity and cultural events. "So that Lauffen can regain its old centre." Löw would also like to rebuild the historic fountain at his own expense.

The city has not yet issued a statement regarding the extent to which this ambitious project should be integrated into the European Capital of Culture 2024 project. This would certainly be a blessing for Lauffen since the venerable market square was neglected in the past.

The European Heritage Project has already come up with something special for the Advent season. A nativity museum is to be set up in the back of the old salt merchant house at Lauffen 15 to prevent this old tradition of the Salzkammergut falling into oblivion.