Dylan Thomas Centre set to become a world-class exhibition for learning

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has given City and County of Swansea (CCS) the green light to progress plans to develop the centre, which is home to a permanent exhibition devoted to the famous Welsh poet, and to create more opportunities for local people and visitors from across the world to explore Dylan Thomas's life and work, with the award of a first-round pass and a £40,000 development grant.

The centre is a Grade II listed building and the exhibition is a focal point for studies and events, housing the largest collection of Dylan Thomas material of its kind in the world. The current collection contains unique archive material, rare manuscripts, artwork, photographs, books and original sound recordings, but only 140 out of 950 artefacts are currently on display. The proposed project will give access to the wider collection, digitise the artefacts and refresh the exhibition and interpretation to create an interactive learning experience and in doing so regain Category A museum accreditation.

Plans include the appointment of an education officer and an outreach officer to help develop learning opportunities and activities such as writing workshops, events and activity packs as well as taking a touring exhibition out to schools, festivals and community venues. This activity will be supported and guided by Dylan's granddaughter Hannah Ellis as well as involving the community in decision making.

The £40,000 development grant will be used to develop plans and carry out research with the few people still living who knew Dylan Thomas to ensure these memories are saved for the future. This will form part of the improved exhibition.

For the first time, volunteers will be able to get involved and play their part in celebrating and sharing Dylan's life and works to a wider audience. It is important to share Centre staff's expertise with local people to help secure its future as a learning resource.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF Wales, said: "Dylan Thomas is one of the most important figures in Welsh culture and of international significance. He is a source of pride, status and inspiration to the community and there is real demand from local people to get more involved in the centre.

"HLF is committed to supporting projects that help boost Wales's local economy. Around the 50th anniversary of Dylan's death in 2003, it was estimated that Dylan Thomas tourism brought around £3.6million into the local community annually and this project will be a focal point for the centenary celebrations.

"We have awarded a first-round pass in recognition of the potential this project could bring to the local area and Wales as a whole. There is huge competition for our grants so CCS now needs to develop its plans fully in order to compete for a firm award of up to £800,000."

Plans are also in place to loan a collection of Thomas's notebooks which were sold to the University of Buffalo, New York in 1941 to bring them 'home' for the first time since Dylan sold them and activities are planned around this exhibition.

Dylan Thomas's granddaughter, Hannah Ellis, said: "I am thrilled that the Dylan Thomas Centre has received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This opportunity will allow them to achieve their vision of modernising their exhibition to ensure it is ever evolving, interactive and available in a digital format. It will also help them engage with the local communities and organisations, as well as connect with a variety of audiences of different ages and diverse backgrounds."

Cllr Nick Bradley, Swansea Council's Cabinet Member for Regeneration, said: "Dylan Thomas is Swansea's most famous son whose worldwide legacy is enduring and it's vital we do all we can to mark, celebrate and promote his links with our city. This is especially the case as we head towards the centenary of his birth in 2014.

"We're delighted to have secured a development grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will allow us to further develop our proposals to secure additional funding in future. This will help improve the permanent exhibition devoted to Dylan's life and work at the Dylan Thomas Centre, attract more visitors from all corners of the world and enable us to undertake an education and outreach programme.

"It's important that we strengthen Swansea's status as a leading city of culture. Proposals of this nature, along with the ongoing, multi-million pound refurbishment of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and other key projects will help us reach that goal."

The project has strong support and expertise of key bodies including the Welsh Government, Visit Wales, University of Wales and National Library Wales, which will help contribute both funding and expertise. The Prince of Wales is the patron of the 2014 centenary celebrations.

HLF previously invested £820,000 into the regeneration of Cwmdonkin Park, which was an important source of inspiration to the poet and featured famously in his poem, 'The Hunchback in the Park'. The work is due for completion at the end of this year in time for the centenary celebrations.

About Dylan Thomas

- Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea in 1914 and died in 1953 at the age of 39
- Dylan's most popular poems include 'Do not go gentle into that good night' and 'And death shall have no dominion'. He also included poetry in his famous play for voices, 'Under Milk Wood'
- His work has a number of high profile fans including former US presidents, such as Bill Clinton and A-list celebrities such as Bob Dylan
- The Dylan Thomas Centre is a Grade II listed building, the exhibition which opened in 2001, is home to a permanent exhibition devoted to Dylan's life and work and owns the largest collection of Dylan Thomas material of its kind in the world

Notes to editors

The HLF first-round pass means that CCS is able to move to the second round of the HLF application process. It has up to two years to submit more detailed plans and apply for the remainder of the £800,000 HLF support that it is seeking for the project.

Further information

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