Merthyr’s Old Town Hall given major boost from Welsh Assembly Government and Heritage Lottery Fund

28/03/2011

The Welsh Assembly Government agreed £4m of funding for the project last week and today the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded a first-round pass* of £2m. These will be major contributions to the £8 million funding package proposed for the refurbishment project, which also includes a £100,000 contribution from CADW.

The HLF first-round pass means Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA), who owns the building, can now progress to the next stage of the HLF application process and submit more detailed plans to see the £2 million of HLF support rolled out.

Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association is working with Cardiff’s Chapter Arts Centre to develop plans to restore the 112 year old building so it can be used as a vibrant arts and creative industries centre for the community as well as a social focal point for the town. Chapter will operate the building after completion and will work closely with Soar Chapel, the Welsh language and community facility and the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute project to encourage public access to the arts and lifelong learning.

When the works are completed the refurbished building will have over 2,500 square metres of floor space, including offices, rehearsal spaces, studios and work spaces for visual, performing arts and media. It will accommodate events such as music concerts, theatre and dance performances and exhibitions.

Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Jocelyn Davies, said: “This is great news for the people of Merthyr and an excellent example of how regeneration is about so much more than bricks and mortar.

“The refurbishment project will provide job and training opportunities as well as improving the appearance of the town and the arts centre will provide the space for the community to come together to experience something new, to learn new skills or meet new friends.

“It’s also an excellent example of organisations working together for the good of the community and I wish Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association and Chapter the very best of luck with their joint venture.”

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of HLF in Wales, said: “This project aims to restore the Grade II* Old Town Hall and return it to the heart of the community as a much needed focal point. Local people are expected to play an important part in the development of the centre with great opportunities for volunteers of all ages to get involved in researching the story of the building, and oral history projects to share Merthyr’s heritage with visitors to the area."

“What’s more the project will compliment the proposals for the Pontmorlais Townscape Heritage Initiative. We have awarded a Round One pass to the Old Town Hall project in recognition of the potential difference it could make to Merthyr and the surrounding area, making it a better place to live, work and visit.”

Karen Dusgate, Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association, said: “We are celebrating because these vital funding announcements mean we should be able to start work on the £8m restoration of the Old Town Hall soon."

“This is exciting news for people in Merthyr because the new Arts and Creative Industries Centre is a community project right at the heart of the plans for the regeneration of the town centre. As a local, community-based organisation, we are proud to be working closely with Chapter, Soar and the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute project.”

Janek Alexander, Director of Chapter, said: “The Old Town Hall stands in the centre of Merthyr Tydfil and is a testament to its proud and unique industrial heritage. Now a major change is underway again and Chapter is looking forward to playing a key role in that change. Our centre in Cardiff also started as a semi derelict, old building but now attracts over 750,000 visitors a year. It’s a vibrant hub for the local community and artists set around a welcoming social space and Merthyr Old Town Hall deserves the same success.”

Notes to editors

* A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Merthyr Tydil Housing Association
• Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association is a not-for-profit organisation committed to improving housing and homes for local people for over three decades.
• The housing association also makes a vital contribution through its community development programme and is a key partner in Merthyr’s regeneration programme.

Chapter
• Chapter was founded in 1971 as meeting place for people and for ideas.
• 40 years later it is regarded as one of the most successful multi-disciplinary arts organisations in the UK and a major centre for contemporary arts in Europe.
• Chapter starts its 40th birthday celebrations during a big weekend of activity from the 15 April 2011.
• Chapter welcomes over 750,000 visitors annually. Their artistic work and influence is widespread and it is an important part of many people’s lives.
• Over 150 voluntary organisations rely on Chapter too provide facilities for the delivery of workshops, courses and events.
• Chapter supports creative organisations and artists, providing support and a home for many of Wales’ best-known and award-winning names in theatre, dance, music, art and animation.
• Chapter works with hundreds of community groups to develop innovative ways of engaging new audiences for the arts.
• Contact: Carol Jones on 029 2031 1060 / 07885 367 848 / carol.jones@chapter.org / Chapter website

Merthyr Tydfil Town Hall
• Work started on Merthyr’s town hall in 1896 and the building – at first known as the Public Offices – came into use in 1898. It was renamed in 1899.
• The historic Grade II listed building was designed by Welsh architect E.A. Johnson of Abergavenny and Merthyr.
• The town hall combined law courts, including cells, and council offices.
• For nine decades the town hall was the focal point for Royal visits, elections – including Keir Hardie’s success in being

elected the first ever Labour Party MP in 1900, parades and celebrations.
• The town hall was the headquarters of the local authority until 1990 when Merthyr Borough Council moved to the newly built civic centre.
• The building was derelict for two years, sold into private ownership and converted into a nightclub which closed in 2000.