

Carys Howell speaking at an event

I was first attracted to applying for a role as a Committee member because HLF looks at heritage in its broadest sense. It includes landscapes, people, language and it also covers the whole of Wales. I know how important it is that heritage in all its forms across Wales is protected so this was a golden opportunity to make a real difference in preserving the heritage of Wales in all its senses.

In examining an application for funding, I always look at the benefit to people; how will this project improve lives and communities across Wales. Caring for local heritage is also really important to me. I am particularly keen to ensure that buildings are used and for people to be able to make the spaces sustainable in the future.

Heritage is what people decide to be important from their past. That can be interpreted in a number of ways, and the flexibility and range of HLF grant schemes is really enabling.

However, supporting some of the bigger projects for Board approval in London, where more money is available, has also been particularly rewarding. The Wales Committee makes recommendations for Board projects over £2million but we can give passionate support for those projects that we feel are worthwhile and provide our expert and local knowledge and it's great when they are given the funding and you feel that you played a part in that outcome. The amount of money that has been allocated to these major projects in Wales during the time I was part of the Committee is very significant – £51million.

This has been true on a number of occasions including many of the major parks in Wales as well as The Old Town Hall in Merthyr Tydfil and Dyffryn Gardens.

Projects that focus on the landscape and coastline of Wales have always held a particular attraction. One that particularly stands out for me was the Nant Gwrtheyrn Heritage Project. It brought everything together - Welsh language; built heritage; natural heritage - and it's in such a fantastic location. I recently went to a wedding there and what struck me was that HLF support for this centre has ensured that it has become really viable and sustainable. Combined with the strong partnership built with the Ll?n Landscape project, another HLF funded project in the area, this really was an outstanding project.

I have also been really impressed with the HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiatives, which regenerate town centres for commercial and social use, and I had the opportunity to go across Wales, to places such as Haverford West and Colwyn Bay and see how they could look better, how they would operate more effectively and then saw how they were improved, regenerated and became more vibrant, all because of HLF support.

As someone who is passionate about education and training, the skills funding is another key HLF focus that has interested me particularly. My first job as a Committee member was to give awards to heritage trainees from across Wales at the National Museum of Wales, at St Fagans. They had gained knowledge and were able to fill a gap where expertise skills were desperately needed. Meeting enthusiastic, young people interested in their heritage is so rewarding.

My experience as a Committee member for Wales, working as part of a team has made me realise the level of expertise there is around the table; to always put your own opinion across but aim at achieving consensus. Having worked for the National Trust for 13 years I had experience of wider heritage in Wales; I spoke Welsh and I was also on the Tourist Board, but I learnt so much from my colleagues on the HLF Committee for Wales.

Knowledge, enthusiasm and understanding of not only heritage but other sectors as well, is essential for a Committee member. For example, we've had a member of the Committee with hearing difficulties, which provided an additional dimension and consideration to projects.

Being able to bring different expertise and experiences to the table is important but being able to talk to people as well, to really understand their projects on site visits is what is so important.

What's great about HLF and the Committee approval process is the honesty and openness around the table and the excellent support of the staff working with them. They're all enthusiastic about their projects and provide expert help and advice.

I have also been proud of the fact that HLF can act as a catalyst to bring in extra funding for projects from other sources too.

Most importantly, remembering how people matter is key and how the grants we award will have an impact. This was particularly apparent for me when we were considering the Mencap Cymru project, Hidden Now Heard, which will give a voice to those who lived in Wales' long-stay institutions who weren't heard in the past. This newly funded project will provide the first museum of learning disability anywhere in the world and it will be based here, in Wales.

Bringing this project to fruition was exceptionally rewarding. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to go out and meet with Mencap Cymru before they had officially submitted their application and hearing and seeing their enthusiasm for

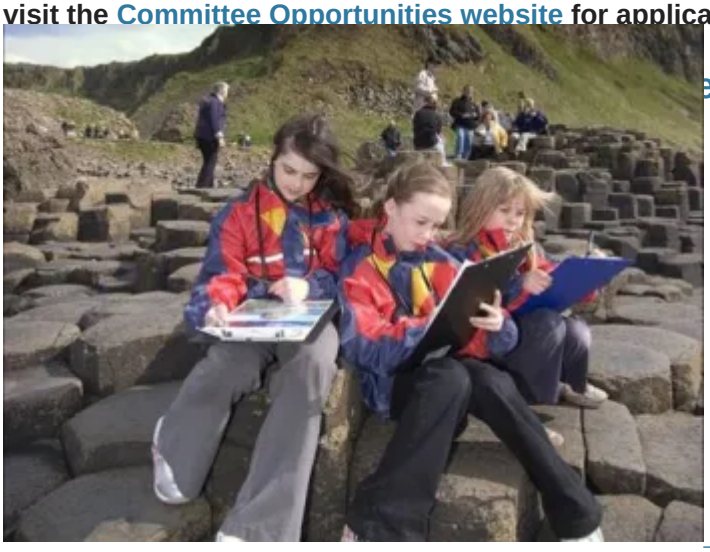
such an innovative project was inspiring.

Through HLF we can bring stories to life. The Diverse Excellence Cymru is an excellent example, which was created to “Write BME experiences into Cardiff's history”. Individual histories and stories were recorded and screened at an event. I was there for the opening and hearing of their pride and their lives in Cardiff was awe-inspiring.

Their ideas of heritage were different – which goes back to my point about the nature of heritage itself - and although focused on their roots and their heritage, it demonstrated how proud they were to be Welsh, with diverse backgrounds.

I shall be very sorry to leave next September. I would stay forever if I could, it’s been one of the most rewarding opportunities I’ve ever had.

If you’re interested in applying to become a Committee Member of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Wales, please visit the Committee Opportunities website for application details. The closing date is 29 September 2014.



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Educational activity at Giant's Causeway

Opportunities to join our Committees