HLF invests £1.5m into Pontmorlais regeneration and gives the green light for three diverse projects across Wales

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It has also awarded three round one passes totalling an additional £1.6m to projects in Cardiff, Hay-on-Wye and Montgomeryshire.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, said: “The Heritage Lottery Fund is the largest funder of heritage in Wales and today’s announcement highlights the diverse range of projects we support, from our historic buildings and distinctive towns, to our local communities and wildlife.

“Our confirmed support for the Pontmorlais THI will play a key role in helping to revitalise this once thriving town. The money will help fund essential improvements and repairs to encourage local businesses and visitors back into the area. Training opportunities will be provided for local contractors to learn new skills and ultimately the scheme will create jobs for the community and attract further investment.

“We have given our initial support to three exciting applications for Hay-on-Wye Cheese Market, Dyfi Nature reserve and Cardiff Museum. Each has the potential to increase opportunities for local people to get involved in the heritage on their doorstep and make a difference to the communities. They now have two years to develop their plans fully in order to compete for confirmed funding at round two.”

Pontmorlais, Merthyr Tydfil – confirmed grant of £1,587,500
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has been awarded a £1,587,500 grant for its Townscape Heritage Initiative to regenerate the town’s Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter.

Merthyr Tydfil has a rich built heritage which bears testimony to the town's past industrial wealth and is rapidly becoming the regional centre of the Heads of the Valleys for leisure, retail and tourism.

The High Street area created between 1770 and 1820 has many grand historical buildings which reflect the town’s past prosperity. The HLF investment will go towards reversing their decline and finding new uses for them with the aim of attracting business start-ups, new investors and visitors and in doing so increase community pride.

It is estimated that 15 buildings will be restored including the Morlais Castle Inn and the grade II listed former Wesley Chapel. The scheme is expected to create several new jobs and safeguard numerous others.

One of the buildings within the conservation area is the grade II listed Soar Chapel which, thanks to £527,000 of HLF support, opened its doors in June 2011 as a venue for performing arts and community activities.

Marlies and Jose Pires, own the Imperial Hotel and the Morlais Castle Inn, both in the Pontmorlais THI area. The Imperial Hotel is a thriving business but the Morlais Castle is in a poor state of disrepair and is one of the buildings hoping to benefit from the THI scheme.

Marlies, said: “Pontmorlais is in a desperate need of regeneration so we are over the moon with the news that this scheme is set to go ahead. In the current economic climate it would be impossible for us and other small businesses to carry out the work needed, the support from HLF means we can now make it happen.

“The recently transformed Soar Chapel is a great attraction so with the rest of the area set to improve all the businesses can join forces and work together to encourage more people to visit and attract further investment. I’m positive it will make a real difference and I’m excited about the future.”

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will be working closely with neighbouring THI’s in Aberdare, Bridgend and Pontypool to share best practice and to deliver training schemes. Links will also be set up with local colleges and construction skills centres to offer training in traditional skills including lead roofing, lime rendering and sash window construction to students, builders and contractors to improve the local skills base.

Councillor Derek Games, Chairman of Planning, from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, said: “As Heritage Champion I am delighted that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is now able to progress plans to revitalise and transform the area from Pontmorlais down to the old Town Hall.

“Having visited Maesteg and Bridgend we have seen the impact a Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme can have on an area. The transformation that took place on their many buildings was extremely impressive making essential improvements and repairs that will encourage local businesses and visitors back into these once vibrant areas.”

A series of community activities are also planned to encourage local people to get involved in their local heritage, which includes Dic Penderyn and the Merthyr Uprising, the Trevethick Trail and the route of the first Railway. Public artworks and interpretation are also planned for the benefit of locals and visitors alike.

Hay-on-Wye Cheese Market - initial support of £259,500 including £33,000 development funding
A group of determined local residents and business people are behind this project which aims to restore the grade II listed Hay-on-Wye Cheese Market building and bring it back into community use. The Cheese Market was built in about 1840 as the market hall by the then lord of the manor, Sir Joseph Bailey. Following years of neglect the building is in need of urgent repair. The proposals from Hay-on-Wye Community Enterprise Community Interest Company include returning the space into its original form with an interpretation area on the history of the town and the building, and a programme of community activities such as a heritage trail and photo exhibition. There are also plans to transform the upper floor into a holiday let to make the project sustainable.

Dyfi 360 landscape for people and wildlife – initial support of £683,700 including £56,600 development funding
Over 30,000 people are attracted each year to the Dyfi Nature Reserve to explore and observe its unique habitats boasting 100 bird species, 48 plant species as well as significant populations of otter, bank vole, dormouse, amphibian species and more recently the pair ospreys. The reserve is an important part of the UNESCO designated Biosphere which covers the Dyfi estuary and is one of only two Biosphere sites in the UK. Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust hopes to extend and conserve the biodiversity of the reserve and transform the site into a year round state of the art wildlife visitor attraction. Plans include a new bird observatory with teaching and exhibition space, remote camera system and a training programme for volunteers.

The Cardiff Story Phase 2 – initial support of £661,000
The Cardiff Story Museum (Phase 1), supported by a £440,000 HLF grant, opened in April 2011 and has seen more than 150,000 visitors through its doors and the involvement of almost 300 volunteers. Phase 2 aims to build on The Cardiff Story’s achievements to date and plans include the creation of a permanent Cardiff’s Communities gallery, a

temporary exhibition space, a café and a public area for research and collection activities.

The aim is to work with Cardiff's diverse communities to provide a venue for the celebration of the city's identity and culture by uncovering the hidden stories of the city. The new phase will expand the Museum's collection with a focus on culture, leisure and sport while creating additional opportunities for volunteering and apprenticeship schemes.

Notes to editors

- HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative encourages partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces. Grants range from £500,000 to £2m. To date, HLF has invested over £200m regenerating towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline.
- 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.