

Boost for historic warship HMS Caroline

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HMS Caroline in Alexandra Dock

The proposals to transform the First World War veteran into a floating museum were awarded a first-round pass, which is an endorsement of the outline project and its ability to deliver high-quality benefits and good value for Lottery money. Development funding of £845,600 was also awarded which will enable the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) to draw up more detailed plans in order to secure the full HLF grant of £12.2million.

The project will preserve and showcase one of the greatest remaining naval heritage assets, making HMS Caroline and her collection of more than 450 objects accessible to the public as a floating museum. Visitors

will be able to learn about the history of the ship, her 300 strong crew and key milestones of her almost century-long service, the links to Belfast and the city's industrial heritage.

Commenting on the award Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "This announcement is fantastic news for HMS Caroline and for Northern Ireland. These exciting proposals to preserve and transform this hugely important heritage asset into a world-class heritage experience will undoubtedly add to, and complement the current offering at the Titanic Quarter. It will also provide a tremendous boost for the local economy with the opportunity to secure more than £12million in Lottery funding, which would be HLF's largest single award in Northern Ireland.

"With development funding and our initial support in place the project can progress to the next stage of the funding process. The hard work will now begin to develop more detailed proposals which will bring the project to life and set out how it will deliver real benefits for local people, the economy and the heritage."

Of huge national and international importance, HMS Caroline is the last remaining warship of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet which fought at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. A light cruiser, weighing 3,750 tons and 446ft long she was at the forefront of technological achievements in her day and at just nine months, still holds the record for the fastest build time of any major warship. Currently, HMS Caroline is one of only 200 vessels in the National Historic Fleet and remains largely unaltered from the day she was constructed in 1914.

The ship will be berthed at the historic Alexandra Dock, which will be conserved alongside the listed Pump House, to serve as a visitor centre and gateway to the ship. Exhibition space within the 120 year-old Pump House will be used to link the heritage of HMS Caroline with the Pump House and other surrounding maritime assets such as Thompson Dock.

A series of workshops, events and activities both on the ship and through a dedicated outreach programme will help to involve local communities with the project. Partnerships with local colleges will also be explored to secure additional learning opportunities for students of history, construction, engineering and tourism.

Welcoming the news, Northern Ireland Tourism Minister Arlene Foster said: "Today's announcement of support by the Heritage Lottery Fund is great news and brings plans to have HMS Caroline restored and preserved for future generations one step closer.

"Over the last year, there has been a significant effort, from myself and others to find a solution to keeping HMS Caroline here. We have developed a strong partnership with the National Museum of the Royal Navy. This partnership will continue as we restore the ship.

"HMS Caroline has become part of the city's rich maritime heritage. Its restoration in the Alexander Dock will complement and enhance our tourism offer in the city and protect a heritage asset of local and national importance. Our ultimate aim is to transform the ship into a world-class floating museum in time for the Battle of Jutland centenary in 2016, as I believe HMS Caroline has huge potential as a visitor experience."

Captain John Rees, NMRN Chief of Staff and Senior Responsible Owner of the Caroline restoration programme says he is relieved that work can now begin: "We are very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the certainty they given to the future of this immensely important vessel.

"HMS Caroline is quite simply one of the most significant historic fighting ships in the world, second only to HMS Victory, and to restore the ship and open it to the public as a shared space, museum and cultural hub in Belfast means the city will benefit hugely from its presence."

Further information

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