HLF helps bring Merthyr Tydfil Old Town Hall back to its heyday through a £2m investment

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Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA) has been awarded the money to secure the future of the building, which has been derelict for over 10 years.

The project is a further piece in the jigsaw of the town's regeneration and will be celebrated at the second Merthyr Tydfil Regeneration Conference taking place at Theatr Soar today.

The Old Town Hall is located within the Pontmorlais Heritage Quarter and this project will complement the £1.5million HLF Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme, announced last month. It will also follow in the footsteps of Theatr Soar, the Grade II listed Soar Chapel, which reopened as a performing arts and community centre in June this year, thanks to £527,000 of investment from HLF.

Built in 1896, the Old Town Hall was designed to house the town's civic functions and law courts, and was once a focal point for political life in Merthyr Tydfil. When the council relocated to Merthyr's civic centre in the late 1980's, the Town Hall was used as a nightclub until 2002 and one can still see the club's garish redecoration in places. The Town Hall has also featured in an episode of the popular BBC sci-fi drama Torchwood.

The grant will fund the restoration of the building, and adapt the interior as a new culture and creative industries centre whilst retaining the building's unique character and celebrating Merthyr Tydfil's rich heritage.

A development manager will be appointed to lead the project's heritage learning and activity programme, which will include a multi-faceted history project. Over 100 local volunteers are expected to get involved in running events, heritage activities and workshops at the centre. Local people will also be able to get involved in making decisions about the Old Town Hall at a number of different levels, including a planned Youth Heritage Board.

Educational spaces will be created to provide facilities contributing to the new Learning Quarter in the area, with Merthyr Tydfil College already committed to delivering media and performing arts programmes at the centre.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of HLF in Wales, said: "We have continued to invest in Merthyr Tydfil in recognition of the difference funding can make in creating a better place to live, work and visit. The Old Town Hall is the grandest building to have survived in Merthyr Tydfil's commercial centre and stands as a permanent reminder of the town's former status. This is a fantastic new venture that will bring a building back to life while responding to the community's need for a dedicated cultural centre."

The refurbishment of the Old Town Hall received funding from Welsh Government in March 2011, as well as investment from CADW and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. First Minister Carwyn Jones said: "This is a great example of how our built heritage can be used as a lever to promote regeneration. The Town Hall will once again offer a host of facilities for use by the local community and visitors.

"The project will also provide a welcome boost to the Welsh construction industry and will create new jobs both during the physical development and longer-term once the facilities are up and running. I am delighted that Welsh Government

funds worth more than £4 million have helped secure this latest funding from the HLF.”

Karen Dusgate, Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association, added: “This is great news. Today’s announcement of the Heritage Lottery Fund’s decision to grant £2million for the Old Town Hall creative industries and arts project is most welcome. We will be working with our partners and the community so the building comes alive again – it’s crucial to the regeneration of Merthyr Tydfil.”

Councillor Jeff Edwards, Leader of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, said: “Town centre regeneration is an important priority for the Council and I am delighted that Heritage Lottery Fund has supported the Old Town Hall Project and the restoration of an iconic building that has for too long been a derelict eyesore in the centre of our town.

“This continued investment from HLF in supporting our built heritage strategy is making a real difference in preserving our heritage and bringing back into economic use buildings that are contributing to the vitality of our town.”

HLF has supported 45 projects in Merthyr Tydfil with a total investment of £5,449,466.