£12.8m to bring Plymouth's legends to life at major



Plymouth is celebrating a truly historic moment after scooping earmarked funding of £12.8million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to create a major new historic and cultural attraction at the very heart of the city.

The HLF today announced the results of its major grants (applications of £5m and over) Board meeting which saw Plymouth approved to receive more than half of the cash needed (a total of £12,873,500) to create the much anticipated £21m ‘History Centre’ that will breathe life into the city’s world-famous figures and most precious historic collections.

Nerys Watts, Head of HLF South West, said: “Plymouth's heritage is of national importance. These exciting and visionary proposals are the first step towards developing a new and much-needed Plymouth History Centre. They will showcase a host of wonderful artefacts, photographs, films and records, which will now be safely housed in one place, for both local residents and visitors to explore. We’re very proud to be supporting the creation of this ‘treasure trove’ and applaud the council’s plans to make it widely available so people can explore both their own personal heritage as well as Plymouth’s rich history.'

Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader of the Council, said: “We are absolutely thrilled the HLF has recognised the importance of Plymouth’s fantastic heritage with such a large investment, which we believe is a record amount for the city. We can now create a major new visitor attraction that will proudly tell the stories of the city's legends and heroes, like Drake, Scott and Reynolds who helped shape the modern world. It will change the face of history in Plymouth.”

The History Centre, which will not be the attraction's eventual name, will unite five separate heritage collections into one single location including treasures from the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery; Plymouth and West Devon Record Office; South West Film and Television Archive; South West Image Bank and the Local Studies and Reference Collection from the Central Library. Plymouth University is also an official partner through the engagement of Peninsula Arts and its world leading research and teaching in history and related disciplines.

An important factor contributing to the success of the bid to the HLF was the Council's investment of £5M to the History Centre, which demonstrated the clear commitment of city leaders to the project.

Councillor Tudor Evans, Leader of the Council, said: "This is incredible! What an achievement by a truly talented team of people, made strong through a shared vision and solid partnership. It was a real pleasure to lead the bid team. We recently secured our 'City Deal' and now we've got our 'History Deal' – Plymouth is set for major development with the potential to benefit the entire region. Plymouth has amazing stories of international importance to tell and we've put our heritage at the centre of the city's future growth and success.

"The History Centre will be an inspirational place for people of all ages and backgrounds. They will flock to see its fascinating collections, hear its incredible stories and enjoy its unique atmosphere. It will be a regular haunt for students and academics to research and study, a must-see for tourists, a mainstay for local families looking for adventure and fun, and an irresistible magnet for history and art-lovers. It will celebrate and save our heritage and instil pride in our past, present and future. It will create jobs for local people, attract visitors to the city and benefit the local economy enormously."

The listed buildings on North Hill which currently house the museum and Central Library will be refurbished, a new large extension added and the former St Luke's Church at Tavistock Place will also be renovated. Together this will create an attraction three times the size of the existing museum, which will include WOW spaces to showcase the staggering array of historic treasures that will be brought to life with interactive displays encouraging visitors to explore further.

David Buckingham, Chair of the Plymouth Barbican Trust of which SWIB is part, said: "SWIB are delighted to be a partner of the new History Centre. With a library of over 1million photos, many of which have been rescued from disposal, we are now faced with the unique opportunity of opening up this rich archive to the wider community so that both current and future generations can have insight into the life of Plymouth over the last 100 years."

An added dimension to the History Centre project is the development of the former St Luke's Church on Tavistock place, which will be restored to offer the largest gallery space in the South West. The aim is that this grand exhibition space will attract some of the most impressive and notable travelling national and international exhibitions to Plymouth.

David Beadel, Chairman of SWFTA, said: "The HLF award is of huge significance to the South West Film and Television Archive. It secures for Plymouth and the South West a long term home for the largest regional film archive in the UK. It will also bring together the most important heritage collections in the city in a ground-breaking way, which will make the collections relevant and accessible to the public in an exciting, world class environment."

Professor Dafydd Moore, Executive Dean of Arts and Humanities at Plymouth University, said: "It is a real pleasure to play a part in bringing such an ambitious and exciting project to fruition for our city. For too long Plymouth's place in history, and history's place in Plymouth, has been assumed rather than explored, accepted rather than celebrated. The History Centre will change all of that and provide countless opportunities for people to understand not only more but also differently about their world."

Add the cash from the successful HLF bid to the council's £5m investment and total funding for the History Centre currently stands at almost £17.9m. The remaining £3.1m will be sourced from other grants including European funding.

The History Centre project will receive an initial £940,300 grant from HLF to complete its development phase, which will involve a solid year of planning and consultation to work up the detailed designs for the buildings and exhibition spaces. Once the plans are approved, the remaining £11,933,200m will be released to undertake the build project, as well as transform three organisations into one major new attraction.

Councillor Smith continued: "We're really excited about our plans, which show this is so much more than a building project, although refurbishing our beautiful grade II listed buildings is part of it - it's about creating something for the people of Plymouth and our visitors.

"We'd like to thank all those in the Heritage Consortium, who have been passionate supporters of the History Centre bid, and look forward to working with them to develop the project. Together we're taking Plymouth's history off the shelves and putting it in its rightful place at the very centre of our city for people to see, touch and experience."

To make the History Centre a truly community-led attraction, the council and partners will be holding more consultation and engagement activities with the public to gather ideas and gain feedback that will be used as part of the development phase. More events like the Pop-up Museum, taking place in Drake's Circus next week as part of History Month, will be organised giving people the chance to get involved.

Some early ideas have been formed but the project team is keen to stress that much of the detail is up for grabs, and suggestions from the public are very welcome to ensure the centre appeals to the widest possible audience.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the developing History Centre plans should visit Love Our Past website which includes some key dates for your diaries, examples of the city's show stoppers and an overview of what the History Centre is all about. The planned opening date for the History Centre is by spring 2019.

Notes for editors

- The History Centre is a £21m transformation project that will bring Plymouth's history to life in the very heart of the city.
- It will unite five separate collections from across three organisations and in doing so create one central attraction responsible for preserving and promoting Plymouth's heritage.
- Official partners of the History Centre are: Plymouth City Council (Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and the Centre Library), South West Film and Television Archive, South West Image Bank and Plymouth University.
- The build element of the project will increase the size of the existing Museum by three times, renovating the former St Luke's Church in Tavistock Place and adding a brand new extension.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded Plymouth £12,873,500 - £940,300 for the development phase and £11,933,200 for the delivery phase.
- Plymouth City Council has committed £5m to the History Centre project.
- The History Centre is expected to be open in spring 2019.
- Heritage Grants (HG) applications are assessed in two rounds. A first-round pass is given when HLF has endorsed outline proposals and earmarked funding. A first-round pass may also include an immediate award to fund the development of the project. Detailed proposals are then considered by HLF at second-round and as long as plans have progressed satisfactorily and according to the original proposal, an award for the project is confirmed.