£1.28million Lottery Boost to Conserve Portaferry's Historic Heritage

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The first-round pass* decision has earmarked over £1.28million through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) programme for Portaferry Regeneration Limited's proposals to restore the town's historic centre. The award includes development funding of £49,100 to enable more detailed proposals to be developed and the organisation now has 12 months to submit the fully developed plans in order to secure the full award.

Since 1998, HLF has invested nearly £200million through the THI programme to regenerate towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline. THI encourages partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces within these defined areas, aiding social and economic regeneration and helping to improve the quality of life for all those who live, work or visit there.

Portaferry, at the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula on the shores of Strangford Lough, was once a thriving port and boasts many fine merchants' properties dating back to that prosperous era. Today, Strangford Lough is a Marine Nature Reserve and EU Special Area of Conservation, renowned for its wildlife and scenic beauty. Portaferry is home to Exploris, the Northern Ireland Aquarium and is also a good base for visiting the National Trust properties of Castleward and Mount Stewart. It is rich in arts and crafts activity and has a developing literary scene, being the birthplace and home of the famous actor and playwright Joseph Tomelty.

The THI scheme is focussed on the commercial heart of the town which contains a significant number of historic buildings and structures that contribute to Portaferry's special townscape character. It offers the opportunity to bring back into sustainable use some of the currently redundant or underused historic buildings on High St, in the Square, on Ferry St and on the shore front. A programme of activities will be developed to encourage local people to learn about and become involved in the heritage of their area. It will provide opportunities for employment, education and learning, and for training in traditional building skills.

The scheme will act as a catalyst for further regeneration within the area, benefiting the local community, property owners, traders and visitors to the town, through various community initiatives.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "Portaferry Regeneration Limited have worked hard to deliver a scheme with a clear vision, which will restore the rich historic fabric of the town and bring a range of benefits to the wider community. The restoration of the townscape will enable local people to take greater pride in, and celebrate their unique heritage whilst learning new skills and becoming actively involved in the transformation of their town. The regeneration will also bring economic rewards through the creation of new employment opportunities and the enhancement of the town's huge tourism potential, and we are delighted to support these ambitious plans."

Doug Edmondson, Chairman of Portaferry Regeneration Limited welcomed the news, and said: "This is a great achievement for Portaferry, it offers a splendid opportunity to re-invigorate the local economy and preserve our built heritage at the same time. We are grateful to all those who helped in the task of putting our HLF application together and look forward to being able to utilise financial assistance for the town after our successful round two submission in

12 months' time."

Notes to editors

* A Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) earmarked first-round pass means that money has been set aside by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the scheme in question. Competition at this stage is tough, and while it does not guarantee funding, it is an indication of positive support. The applicants can then progress to the second round and submit a further, fully-developed application to secure the full award. On occasion, development funding will also be awarded at the first round. This early level of strong financial commitment means that THIs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided their final proposals fully meet the programme criteria.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.