HLF gives initial approval for £1.6m regeneration of Aneurin Bevan's home town

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HLF's initial indication of investment comes through its Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)² programme which fosters partnerships between local organisations enabling repairs and other essential works in historic but often run-down areas.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has received a first-round pass for the initiative including £50,000 of development funding to help progress their plans to the next stage.

Tredegar was one of the first planned industrial towns in Britain and an early centre for the industrial revolution in South Wales, with its distinctive grid-like street pattern radiating from a central cast iron clock tower. However the 19th-century town centre has since suffered decades of structural decline due to the loss of the coal and steel industries.

At the heart of Tredegar lies the 'Circle', the town's historic core, which forms the main focus for the regeneration initiative. Plans include the restoration of 17 priority residential and commercial buildings including, the Tredegar Arms Hotel, the former NCB club and the Tredegar Medical Aid Society building, established in 1890, which Aneurin Bevan used as a model to establish the NHS. The Council has identified the potential of marketing Tredegar as a heritage health town, combining its industrial and NHS heritage.

The ultimate aim is to create new and sustainable uses for the buildings which will benefit local people and attract new investors and visitors to the area. The scheme will complement other HLF funded projects in the area including the restored Bedwellty House and Park which received a £3.8m grant.

Bedwellty House is already being marketed as a visitor destination and hosts a growing number of conferences, events and functions which would provide opportunities for accommodation providers and restaurants in the historic core.

The project also hopes to offer traditional skills training with innovative partnerships such as the locally based Centrica – the British Gas green skills training centre. Priority will be given to experienced construction workers and unemployed young people to help increase employability. The aim is to address the local skills gap and create a traditionally skilled workforce for the area, which will secure built heritage in the future.

Manon Williams, Chair of the HLF's Committee for Wales, said: "In the current economic climate this grant will provide a much deserved boost for Tredegar.

"Our town centres need to be brought back to life and the Heritage Lottery Fund believes that even small changes, like improving shop fronts or restoring a building's historic features, can make a difference. By working closely with local authorities and their respective communities, our substantial investment will help bring vacant properties back into use as well as create new business and training opportunities that will be of benefit to many."

As well as addressing the needs of historic buildings in the town, the scheme hopes to create a full time post for a project officer and administrative assistant to manage the THI. Local people will also benefit from opportunities to learn about the heritage which the buildings represent.

Blaenau Gwent AM, Alun Davies, said: “Heritage is a modern catalyst for regeneration. Creating attractive townscapes is vital in stimulating public and private investment, and instils pride and a strong sense of identity.

“Landmark buildings such as the Heritage Lottery Funded Bedwellty House and Park Regeneration Project play a huge role in regeneration schemes, where historic buildings are imaginatively adapted for new uses within the community.

“Conserving our heritage and diversifying our town centres also fits into the Welsh Government’s priorities for regeneration investment. The Heritage Lottery Funded - Townscape Heritage Initiative, will help continue to develop imaginative ways of realising the potential of our heritage and develop the local skills required to maintain them.”

Richard Crook, Director of Environment and Regeneration, Blaenau Gwent Council, said: “This exciting regeneration scheme is designed to build a more vibrant future for Tredegar’s communities. It will attract inward investment and provide much-needed stimulus for economic growth that ultimately benefits local people. We welcome the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund at this stage in our application, and hope that we can continue to work together going forward.”

Other funders include the Welsh Government (Heads of the Valleys Programme), Cadw and the Silent Valley Environmental Trust.

Further information

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Notes to editors

[1] 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. 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.

[2] HLF’s Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) 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 £214m regenerating towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline. The deadline for first-round applications is 31 October 2012 and decisions will be made in March 2013.