Welsh town centres win £2.5m Heritage Lottery regeneration boost

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This investment is part of the HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI)* which has invested over £22 million in Wales since it was established in1998. The aim is to channel vital lottery funds into the built heritage of communities which have suffered serious social and economic decline. As well as making a huge impact on the physical environment, local people will benefit from opportunities to learn about the heritage which the buildings represent and to gain new skills based on their restoration.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: "The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to be playing a key role in helping to revitalise these once thriving Welsh towns. The benefits are far reaching. This money will help support local authorities and residents to transform their towns, making essential improvements and repairs that will encourage local businesses and visitors back into these once vibrant areas."

Pontmorlais, lying within Merthyr Tydfil's town centre has a rich built heritage which bears testimony to the town's past industrial wealth. Today Merthyr suffers from some of the highest rates of social and economic deprivation in Wales.

HLF has awarded a first round pass of £1,637,500 including £50,000 of development funding to Merthyr County Borough Council to help progress the scheme.

The High Street area created between 1770 and 1820 has many grand historical buildings which reflect the town's past prosperity. The HLF investment will go towards reversing their decline and finding new uses for them which will benefit local people, with the aim of attracting new investors and visitors.

One of the buildings within the conservation area is Soar Chapel which was awarded a grant from HLF of £527,000 in 2009 to adapt the Grade II listed building into a venue for performing arts and community activities.

Lis McLean, Canolfan a Menter Gymraeg Merthyr Tudful said: "This is great news for Merthyr Tudful! One of our hopes during the development of the Soar Project was that it would kick start the regeneration of the Pontmorlais area. This is an area that is in dire need of investment. The THI will enable other organisations, businesses and residents to improve their buildings in a cohesive and sympathetic way. The initiative will enhance the Soar Project and could potentially result in its future expansion."

Merthyr Tydfil Council's proposed links with Merthyr Tydfil College will also provide conservation skills training to students, local businesses and residents to improve the local base of skills in the area and ensure long term upkeep of the built heritage.

A series of community activities are also planned to encourage local people to explore the heritage on their doorstep, which includes Dic Penderyn and the Merthyr Uprising, the Trevethick Trail and the route of the first Railway. Ideas for community engagement range from interpretation via artworks and an oral history project to record local people's memories.

Councillor Derek Games, Chairman of Planning, from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, said: “As Heritage Champion I am delighted that Merthyr Tydfil Council is now able to progress plans to revitalise and transform the area from Pontmorlais to the Town Hall.

“Having visited Maesteg and Bridgend we have seen the impact a THI scheme can have on an area. The transformation that took place on their many buildings was extremely impressive. This is fantastic news for the people of Merthyr and I’d like to thank the regeneration team for their hard work to make this happen.”

Cefn Mawr THI, Wrexham

The town of Cefn Mawr was heavily industrialised throughout the 18th and 19th centuries thanks to vast deposits of iron, sandstone and coal. The nearby Llangollen Canal with Pontcysylte Aqueduct was designated a World Heritage Site in 2009 and is recognised as a masterpiece of engineering.

HLF has awarded a Round One pass of £870,600 including a £8,400 development grant to help Wrexham County Borough Council realise its vision for Cefn Mawr focusing on the commercial centre of the town.

This scheme will build on the success of a first THI phase to which HLF awarded a £1m grant in September 2005. To date 16 building projects have been completed, 1,846 sq m of vacant floor space has been brought back into use, with 27 full time jobs created and 25 safeguarded and 500 people have attended a skills training scheme.

The new grant is crucial to complete the repair and conservation of remaining priority buildings within the key areas, Crane Street and Well Street. The completion of the scheme will help encourage further business start-ups, maintain the new level of community pride and optimism and attract a wider tourism audience.

Maelor Lloyd-Williams has been in business in Cefn Mawr for the last 20 years with a pharmacy and hair salon in the village. His latest business is one of nine new business start ups as a result of the Phase One and is testament to the positive impact the THI has already had on the community. He said: “Once the renovation work to our properties was completed we took the opportunity to expand the hairdressers and open a beauty salon. We’ve had such a positive response to the look of the salon and we’re now attracting a high level of customers from outside the area.

“The scheme has been a tremendous benefit to us and I’d encourage others to take advantage of it and start a new business in the village. With the Pontcysylte Aqueduct being named a World Heritage Site, the area is now attracting more tourists to the area, particularly walkers and we need to capitalise on this.

“I’m positive that Cefn Mawr will be a really busy and bustling village again and I’m proud to be a part of it.”

The funding would also support the continuation of community and education activity, including heritage awareness days and an extension of the town’s heritage trail, increasing links with the Pontcysylte Aqueduct.

Following the success of the skills training initiatives with the Dee Valley Partnership Group in Phase One, Wrexham Council will be looking to build on future training opportunities for contractors as well as run a series of workshops specifically for local people.

Councillor Warren Coleman, chair of the Cefn Mawr Regeneration and Townscape Heritage Initiative Partnership, said: “The first injection of lottery funding made a tremendous difference to the village, helping to breathe new life into key buildings and creating opportunities for residents, community groups and businesses.

“The fact we’ve secured further funding to progress plans for Phase Two is fantastic news, and I’m confident we can continue to build on our success thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund.”

Councillor Rodney Skelland, Wrexham Council’s Lead Member for Regeneration and Corporate Governance, also welcomed the news. He added: “The project in Cefn Mawr represents an investment in both the past and future of the village. This latest funding boost will help ensure the community continues to benefit from the new opportunities created by renovating key shops, homes and public buildings that need investment.”

Pontmorlais and Cefn Mawr were two of eleven towns and villages across the UK to receive a much-needed total boost of £14m from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Commenting on the announcement, Wayne Hemingway MBE, Hemingway Design and Chair of Building for Life**,said: “What fantastic news. Investing in our town centres is hugely important, not only to look after the precious older buildings but also to improve people’s quality of life. Investment like this makes a real difference by giving residents a better place to live and getting the local economy moving. For the liveability of our towns and cities it’s vital to create urban landscapes that provide something for everyone, places to relax, meet people, a home, a business or even new training opportunities, and the Heritage Lottery Fund’s continued support helps this become a reality.”

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.

** Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. Good quality housing design can improve social wellbeing and quality of life by reducing crime, improving public health, easing transport problems and increasing property values. Building for Life promotes design excellence and celebrates best practice in the house building industry

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.

Further information

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