Milestone investment into Welsh towns marked with launch of new programme.

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Since 1998, the HLF has helped breathe life back into our towns through its Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) programme, which has invested more than £30m into 22 towns across Wales. And today (10 April) Porthcawl, in the county of Bridgend, has become the latest town to benefit from the funding.

Part of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC)'s wider Seven Bays scheme, HLF has awarded the local authority a first-round pass of £524,900 to focus on regenerating the seaside town's harbour and historic square, where there are nine vacant properties, with some that have been left empty for decades.

Historic buildings benefit

The proposed project aims to bring many of the harbour's historic buildings back into use, including the Grade II listed Jennings building, a former warehouse that was used as a RAF rescue station during the Second World War and the 'Knights Arms' on the historic square, which is planned to be converted into a series of holiday lets for the town's tourism market. A development grant of £25,000 has been awarded to fund the role of a Project Officer, who will be responsible for working with local businesses and partnerships to further develop the plans.

Dr Manon Williams, Chair of HLF in Wales, said: "Porthcawl was once a thriving tourism destination, but like many traditional British seaside towns, it has had to face tough challenges in recent decades. The County Borough of Bridgend is one of HLF's new priority development areas in Wales until 2018, so we are particularly delighted to be playing a part in the town's regeneration, enhancing its appeal to visitors and local people alike and taking advantage of its heritage assets to make a contribution to the local economy."

Councillor Phil White, BCBC Cabinet Member for Communities, said: "We welcome this investment which forms part of our ambitious, multi-million pound regeneration programme for Porthcawl aimed at creating a first class, 21st century seaside resort for residents, businesses and visitors.

"The grant contributes to a total fund of over £1million, with other financial contributions coming from BCBC and Cadw. This will be used for restoring key historic buildings to their former glory as well as finding new uses for them. With the scheduled opening of the new marina later this year, and progress on other developments now taking place, this is an exciting time for Porthcawl. Subject to a more detailed application being passed the new THI will start in spring next year and I look forward to seeing the restoration and re-use of these buildings in the near future."

New grant programme launched

While HLF will continue to support local authorities like BCBC to restore multiple buildings within conservation areas through its updated Townscape Heritage (TH) programme; a new grant programme, Heritage Enterprise, opens to applications this month (April 2013), offering grants of between £100,000 and £5m. The grant programme is considered to be a pioneering new funding opportunity, designed to stimulate local economic growth by unlocking the commercial potential of new and unused historic buildings.

Dr Manon Williams explains: "Our historic buildings need new uses in order to survive and Heritage Enterprise will help to fund their restoration while protecting their future. Once these buildings have been revived for commercial and community use, we are confident that they will encourage growth in the local economy, generate income, jobs and provide opportunities for people to gain new skills."

Professor Phil Jones, Head of the Welsh School of Architectural Science, which is launching a new Master's course on Sustainable Building Conservation this coming September, added: "The challenge is, to ensure that in restoring our heritage buildings, they are able to function in a sustainable way, to use energy efficiently, and to provide good quality environments for people to live and work. This new funding initiative should specifically target these aspects of refurbishment."

Case study: Local builder gives future to Georgian townhouse

One of 22 areas to have benefited from HLF funding is the market town of Denbigh in north east Wales, which received a total of £2.75m through the THI programme over two phases of work since 2000.

The final part of the regeneration project, the restoration of the Grade II listed Mostyn House, was completed in February 2013, marking over 12 years of support from HLF in the town. Local builder, John Franklin, was responsible for renovating the 18th century townhouse and transforming the building into a luxury holiday let.

John Franklin, said: "The house dates back to 1722, when it was believed to have been home to the wealthy Mostyn family. Despite having many uses over the years, including a dentist surgery and a stock exchange, it was left empty for more than a decade and was in a really bad state.

"Through the support of HLF, I was able to buy the townhouse and restore it to its original Georgian style, being sure to retain the building's historic features, such as the gable chimney and sash windows.

"At the moment we're busy gearing up for the holiday season and putting the finishing touches to our website. We've already had a few enquiries and I'm looking forward to welcoming visitors over the summer months.

"The town centre has seen a mass improvement through the THI, with many empty buildings back in use. It's definitely brought a lot life back into the area."

Notes to editors

HLF has indentified four priority areas in Wales - Bridgend, Conwy, Flintshire and Newport - until 2018. HLF is keen to generate more heritage projects and funding applications from these areas. Additional advice and support to encourage more grant applications from these areas is available to organisations of all sizes.

An HLF Townscape Heritage (TH) first-round pass means that money has been set aside by HLF. The applicants can then progress to the second round and send a detailed second-round submission to secure the full award. This early level of strong financial commitment means that THs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided their final proposals fully meet the programme criteria.

THs encourage partnerships of local organisations to carry out repairs and other works to a number of historic buildings, structures or spaces. Grants currently range from £500,000 to £2m.

The Townscape Heritage programme, launched on 25 March, offers grants from £100,000 up to £2m. The next application deadline is 31 August 2013 with decisions being made in January 2014.

To date, HLF has invested over £214m regenerating towns that have suffered serious social and economic decline.

Further information

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