Olympic Re-launch for Chesil Beach Centre

31/01/2011

This gives the go-ahead for the £1m redevelopment of the existing interpretation room, kiosk and public toilets to provide exciting new interpretation facilities, education space, indoor café, forecourt area, boardwalk, and new entrance to the car park, with improved parking and general access for people with disabilities.

The project was envisaged in 2002 following the designation of the Dorset and East Devon Coast – the Jurassic Coast – as England's only natural World Heritage Site in 2001. The proposals build on the successful work of the Reserve Wardens and their dedicated team of volunteers who have operated the popular visitor centre since 1995.

The project was developed by a wide range of partners including Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, the Crown Estate, the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team, Dorset County Council, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Ilchester Estate. The new centre will be managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust utilising their skills and experience in managing visitor facilities and engaging people in nature-based activities.

Weymouth & Portland Borough Council Environment Brief holder, Brendan Webster, commented: "This is excellent news for the Borough and it will be wonderful to see the development of an expanded Chesil Centre on Portland in time for 2012. The planned improvements and expansion will provide a new opportunity to highlight the outstanding environment at Chesil & the Fleet and the World Heritage Site, to an increasing number of local people and visitors, especially local and visiting school and college groups. We also hope that the centre will become a focal point for local community activities with the new meeting room and catering facilities."

Brian Bleese, Director of Operations at Dorset Wildlife Trust, said: "This is great news for people and wildlife. The project will enable us to offer many more opportunities for local people and visitors to learn about, enjoy and help to conserve the wonderful natural heritage of the area."

Chesil is one of the finest barrier beaches in the world. It is made up of pebbles and shingle and its 17-mile length has stood up to the full force of the Atlantic for thousands of years. It protects the Fleet, which is the largest tidal lagoon in Britain and a place of international importance for its birds and marine wildlife. The redeveloped Centre will provide the opportunity for visitors of all ages to find out more about the heritage resource of Chesil Beach, the Fleet and the adjacent Lyme Bay and Portland Harbour, set within the context of the World Heritage Site.

The Heritage Lottery funding is being supported with match funding from the Crown Estate, Fine Family Foundation, Weymouth & Portland Council, Portland Gas Trust, Dorset County Council, Garfield Weston Foundation and the Jurassic Coast Team.

Nerys Watts, HLF South West Regional Manager, said: "Chesil beach is of national importance in terms of our natural marine wildlife. This new centre will give more people the chance to learn about and explore this rare landscape. Alongside the new facilities for visitors and education space for schools groups, there will be opportunities for local people to volunteer, so that people from across the community will be able to play a part celebrating this natural heritage treasure."

The existing centre and public toilets are planned to stay open until the end of the summer holidays in 2011. During the works temporary interpretation and a base for staff and volunteers will be provided along with interim catering provision. It is planned that the new centre will be open in time for summer 2012.

Commenting on the successful progress of the project, Sam Rose, World Heritage Team Leader said: “This is fantastic news and the new Chesil Centre will fill a vital gap in providing residents and visitors with an inspiring way to celebrate, explore and enjoy their World Heritage Site. The success of the bid is a tribute to the commitment of the existing centre staff and volunteers, and the determination of all the project partners.”

Notes to editors

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Dorset Wildlife Trust was founded in 1961 to protect the wildlife and natural habitats of the county and now has over 25,000 members and manages over 40 nature reserves. Most are open daily and there are visitor centres providing a wealth of wildlife information at Brooklands Farm, Lorton Meadows, Kingcombe Meadows and Brownsea Island Nature Reserves, The Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve and the Urban Wildlife Centre at Upton Heath Nature Reserve.

The largest voluntary nature conservation organisation in Dorset, DWT plays a key role in dealing with local environmental issues. It leads the way in establishing the practices of sustainable development and engaging new audiences in conservation, particularly in the urban areas. www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

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

Brian Bleese at Dorset Wildlife Trust on 07970 552675.