Hidden heritage of Derwent Valley highlighted

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The Derwent Valley, which stretches from Northumberland in the west to Consett in County Durham, and passes through Gateshead on its route to the Tyne pioneered steelmaking and rail transport.

However, those important contributions, together with many local cultural traditions like rapper sword dancing, are largely forgotten in the shadow of other locations.

The **Land of Oak and Iron**, a partnership project involving Groundwork North East together with the three local authorities, Durham Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England, Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council and the North of England Civic Trust is looking to change that. The innovative scheme has received an earmarked grant of £2.4million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) through its Landscape Partnership programme towards the £3.6m cost.

The scheme also plans to protect many of the unique natural assets of the area and hopes to revolutionise how people think about the Derwent Valley.

Development funding of £155,980 has been awarded to help the Land of Oak and Iron progress plans to apply for the full earmarked grant in 2015 after an 18 month development period.

If successful, the remains of the once extensive coal mining, coke producing and steel making industries would be protected and developed with new opportunities for the public to better understand them.

The human stories of the area will also be told in new and exciting ways, with education playing a major role. From the ‘pitman poet’ Tommy Armstrong, via the clog and rapper sword dancing of iron works families to the impressive estates of the areas landed elite, the Derwent Valley has a unique history that is not widely known.

Although the areas industrial past had a huge impact on the landscape, it did not destroy it; ancient woodland, important grasslands and ecologically valuable wetlands can still be found in abundance. Land of Oak and Iron will continue to protect habitats and increase access so that rare species can be better appreciated.

Groundwork’s Managing Director, Kate Culverhouse, said: “We are delighted to have been awarded Landscape Partnership Funding from the HLF. Over the next seven years we will work with the partners and local communities to deliver exciting heritage, cultural and conservation projects boosting tourism and employment in the Derwent Valley. This landscape has some nationally and globally significant features that are at risk of loss. The project aims to enhance and promote this heritage and the outstanding natural features to attract more local people and visitors into the valley creating a lasting legacy.

“The enthusiasm of local communities will be harnessed to remember and celebrate the area’s distinctive heritage and landscape through initiatives including restoration of structures and habitats, volunteering, outdoor education and skills development opportunities, improved access and creative interpretation to ensure that the heritage is preserved and

enjoyed for generations to come."

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: "Over the past decade, we've had great success with our Landscape Partnership Schemes, especially in the North East, and many threatened landscapes are already on the road to a more secure future. Supporting projects such as this one in the Derwent Valley is particularly important for us at HLF as they bring together both community groups and public bodies with a shared passion of caring for our incredible natural environment. Today's HLF investment for this historically significant landscape, known as the Land of Oak and Iron, will not only strengthen those partnerships but also capture the enthusiasm of local communities and help reconnect them with this wonderful slice of nature."

Notes to editors

A Landscape Partnership earmarked grant means that money has been set aside by the HLF for the scheme in question. The applicant then progresses to the second round and submits a further, fully-developed application to secure the full award. This early level of strong financial commitment means that LPs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided that their final proposals fully meet the programme's criteria.

HLF's Landscape Partnerships are helping bring together members of the community as well as local, regional, and national organisations to deliver schemes which benefit some of the UK's most outstanding landscapes and rural communities. Grants range from £100,000 up to £3m. The next closing date for LP applications is May 2014.

About Groundwork North East

Groundwork North East is committed to the improvement of local communities in areas of need. Through partnership we help to inspire change that will secure all our futures. Operating throughout the region, with dedicated teams based in all four sub-regions. We specialise in environmental improvements, employment and business services, green economy projects and climate change activities. Our success is based on engaging local communities, young people, local businesses and the public sector.

Further information

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