Dorset area of outstanding natural beauty wins Heritage Lottery Fund support

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The project will work with landowners, communities and visitors to make it a better place for wildlife, improve access and bring to life the rich history of the area with innovative interpretation and education facilities. Development funding of £96,100 has also been awarded to help the Dorset AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and its partners progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date.

The South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership Project will help give the Ridgeway the recognition it deserves as a place of unparalleled heritage, outstanding habitats and, of course, fantastic views. The project will work with landowners, environmental and arts organisations and community groups over five years to improve wildlife habitats, protect the historic environment and encourage access, as well as develop educational and training opportunities.

The South Dorset Ridgeway is the ridge of high land running parallel with the coast, between Weymouth and Dorchester. It has been an important place for people since the Neolithic (4000–2000 BC) and has over 1,000 ancient monuments that record the history of the Ridgeway since that time. This new project aims to galvanise people's interest in the Ridgeway again and get it in great shape for future generations to enjoy.

Ian Rees, from the Dorset AONB team, enthused: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. We've got some really excited ideas on how to get people from Weymouth, Dorchester and beyond enjoying the Ridgeway more and can't wait to get started. We want to use art and new technologies to encourage people to find out what makes this area so special".

Explaining the importance of HLF's support, Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "This imaginative Landscape Partnership Scheme will create a future where local communities are directly involved in preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the South Dorset Ridgeway. New opportunities will also be created for visitors from near and far to explore, enjoy and learn about this fascinating landscape. HLF will be offering Dorset AONB full support in taking their application forwards."

Oiver Letwin, MP for West Dorset, added: "I am really delighted to see that the South Dorset Ridgeway has received this very large grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The preservation and enhancement of our natural heritage and the promotion of biodiversity are key aims of the Natural Environment White Paper – and this grant will enable us to make huge progress towards fulfilling these aims here in Dorset."

Notes to editors

[1] A Landscape Partnership (LP) 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 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.

[2] 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 £250,000 up to £2m. The next closing date for LP applications is 28 February 2012.

About the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and it's partners

The Dorset AONB Partnership brings together 20 organisations to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of this nationally important landscape. The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers over 40% of the county, and is one of a family of 49 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To find out more about the Partnership, visit our website at www.dorsetaonb.org.uk.

The Dorset AONB stretches from Lyme Regis in the west, along the coast to Poole Harbour in the east, and north to Hambledon Hill near Blandford Forum. It covers over half of Poole Harbour, including Brownsea and the smaller islands. Outside of the harbour, the designated area ends at mean low water. The AONB includes small areas in Somerset and Devon.

The Dorset AONB is one of the most heavily populated AONBs, with c.70,000 people living within the boundary and approximately 1.35 million people living within 20 miles of the boundary. A number of market and coastal towns lie within the AONB, including Lyme Regis, Bridport, Beaminster and Swanage.

The Dorset AONB had the support of many organisations to put this successful bid together, including Bournemouth University, Dorset Countryside, Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Forest Education Initiative, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Kingston Maurward College, PVA MediaLab, Dorset County Museum, Natural England, English Heritage and various departments of Dorset County Council.

Further information

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