HLF helps save Gower for all its worth

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The unspoilt peninsula to the west of Swansea was the UK's first ever designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Famous for its steep limestone cliffs, secluded bays, spectacular sand dunes and saltwater marshes it is visited by thousands of people every year. It provides an oasis of calm and escape from bustling city life and is a magnet for wildlife enthusiasts, adventure seekers and ramblers.

The City and County of Swansea Council is leading the partnership which is made up of 21 organisations including The National Trust, The Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales and Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust.

HLF's development funding will enable the partnership to progress its plans to protect and restore some of the built and natural heritage features of the landscape, which is currently at risk with pressures from tourism and changes in agricultural usage, particularly along the Heritage Coast.

The project area encompasses 184km², which contains two of the best surviving and most complete historic areas with unrivalled evidence of land use from prehistoric to industrial periods. The peninsula features Neolithic chambered tombs, Bronze Age ritual sites, Iron Age Hill Forts and a 16th century salt house.

In partnership with local landowners the proposed work will include the conservation of these sites, controlling invasive species and managing small woodlands and wet fields.

A programme of activities to encourage the local community, schools, universities and educational groups to get actively involved in conserving and learning more about the heritage and character of their local landscape is at the heart of the four year scheme.

Volunteers will be essential to the success of the project and they will be given training in oral history skills to research and collect people's memories of the Gower, as well as IT skills to help create a dedicated website for the area which will act as a Virtual Visitor Centre. Volunteers will also be trained to undertake surveys on ancient hedge banks and collect information on the coast water to help monitor climate change.

Other projects include a Gower dictionary to record the Gower language, a mixture of Welsh and English with specific names for plants and animals, not heard anywhere else in Wales. The Mari Llwyd, landscape theatre, ghost walks and bat and badger walks are some of the community based events planned.

The partnership will work with the Prince's Trust to deliver a programme of 12 week training courses for disadvantaged young people aged 14 to 25, and following on from this, apprenticeships will be offered with six month placements. The training programme will include ranger activities, dry stone walling, archaeological walking and botanical surveying to build a local skill base for the future.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee for Wales, said: "This project seeks to protect and enhance Gower's nationally important landscape whilst ensuring that it remains a place that people enjoy visiting. Gower's unique cultural heritage is also at risk as the generation of people who remember events and activities that reinforce a sense of place are dying out and this project will record these memories. There is a real opportunity here for local people to get involved, learn new skills and create and ensure a sustainable future for Gower."

“We recognise the potential this project brings in its investment in both the landscape and people to protect our heritage, and therefore we have awarded a development grant to help the partnership progress plans in order to see the full amount rolled out.”

Councillor John Hague, the Chair of the Gower AONB Partnership, said: “I’m delighted we have reached the first stage in our bid to secure over £1million of funding for Gower from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The funding will enable us to work with our partners to develop innovative projects that will enhance the region and keep it a special place for residents in Gower as well as for the thousands of visitors who go there each year.”

For further information contact Kate Sullivan or Helen Newton on 029 2076 4100 or hlf@equinoxcommunications.co.uk

Notes to editors

- *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.
- 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.