Landscape masterpiece receives conservation boost

23/03/2010

A river valley whose image has been immortalised by some of England's best-loved painters is to receive a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of almost £1 million to aid its conservation while improving access and the opportunity for learning, community involvement and skills training.

Managing a Masterpiece is a wide-ranging three-year project based in the Stour Valley. It is being lead by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project in conjunction with the Archaeological Service of Suffolk County Council and the Historic Environment Branch of Essex County Council. In total the Stour Valley Landscape Partnership includes 19 organisations involved in tasks that aim to achieve three main objectives.

The first will help to raise public awareness of the valley landscape and its history, including archaeological digs, a survey of riverside structures, and local traditions, customs and folklore. The second objective targets conservation to demonstrate environmental management with a special emphasis on the views painted by artists such as Constable, Gainsborough and Paul Nash as well as restoring the historic Stour lighter 'John Constable'. The third objective will celebrate the landscape with a range of initiatives. These include new websites featuring a virtual tour of 360 degree panoramic views from church towers, and workshops and exhibitions for new artists and schools using the Valley as inspiration.

The Stour Valley, which forms the border between Suffolk and Essex, covers an area of almost 300 square kilometres. The Landscape Partnership Scheme will concentrate on five specific areas, or clusters, around the villages of Clare, Sudbury, Bures, Stoke by Nayland and Dedham.

Volunteers, local communities and schools will be involved throughout the various projects. There will be public courses in landscape history, farm visits, training in traditional building skills, surveys and artwork. Improvements in public access including walks and cycle trails will be supported by new information leaflets. But there is an emphasis on preventing an increase in visitor traffic. Public transport, in the form of a Hopper Bus, will be encouraged and the restored John Constable lighter will run a passenger service.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, Robyn Llewellyn, said: "This project will enable people to celebrate and enjoy all that this quintessential landscape has to offer. There are a fantastic range of opportunities for local people to get involved in, learn more about and enjoy the natural heritage around them."

James Halsall, Chairman of the Managing a Masterpiece Partnership Board, said: "Managing a Masterpiece will make a real difference about how visitors and residents understand and interact with the area and the exciting range of projects will make a real difference to this special area."

For Essex County Council, Councillor Jeremy Lucas, Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture and Arts, said: "Essex County Council is delighted to be a partner in Managing a Masterpiece, which will bring real improvements to the quality of life of communities in the Stour Valley, providing opportunities for people to become more involved in looking after and enjoying the area's iconic landscape."

Notes to editors

The project, Managing a Masterpiece: The Stour Valley Landscape Partnership has bein awarded a grant of £910,000. Previously, a Project Planning Grant of £48,500 was awarded (December 2005) and a Development Grant of £67,000 was given in April 2008.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms our heritage. Through their grant making, HLF aims to conserve the UK's diverse heritage for present and future generations to experience and enjoy; help more people, and a wider range of people, to take an active part in and make decisions about their heritage; and help people to learn about their own and other people's heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £282 million to more than 2,800 projects across the East of England.

Further information

Roland Smith on 020 7591 6047 / rolands@hlf.org.uk or Phil Cooper on 07889 949173, HLF Communications

Simon Amstutz, Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project on 01473 264263