Lottery boost for Belfast Hills

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Last year HLF endorsed the Belfast Hills Partnership's initial proposals for their Landscape Partnership (LP) scheme, and following twelve months of detailed planning and development the full award has now been secured.

The LP programme acts as a catalyst to bring communities and organisations together to form partnerships that create a shared vision and help implement local action for the conservation and management of our landscape heritage. Each LP scheme contains a portfolio of projects that provide long term social, economic and environmental benefits for the areas.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "We are delighted to announce this grant award which is such wonderful news for the Belfast Hills. The new LP scheme will enable local communities to rediscover and engage with the heritage on their doorstep, and by connecting a host of interested parties the long term future of this heritage asset can be secured."

The Belfast Hills LP scheme comprises over 5,000 hectares of broad, rounded hills which frame the communities of Belfast, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Antrim. The public sites within the area include Divis and Black Mountain, Cave Hill Country Park, Colin Glen Forest Park, Carnmoney Hill and Slievenacloy nature reserve. The area is subject to a high number of designations due to its significant heritage value and is home to 19 scheduled monuments and numerous archaeological features.

Twenty nine individual projects will run across the four year LP scheme, which will help to protect, increase access to and understanding of this outstanding local landscape. It will bring together local residents, community groups, landowners and statutory agencies to develop and implement a plan for the area which focuses on the natural, built, cultural and social heritage of the hills.

Projects to conserve and restore the built and natural heritage features include initiatives to control invasive species, map wildfires and enhance the grassland and farmland habitat to improve the biodiversity and landscape. New access routes will be installed and existing routes upgraded to increase access to the hills and the local community will be encourage to become involved in a series of events and activities to engage them with the heritage of the area.

New skills and development opportunities will also be provided in subjects as diverse as landscape photography, biological surveying and tourist guide training. Community archaeology digs – like the recent one at Cave Hill - will take place as well as efforts to improve facilities at the five public sites. Work on the ground should start early next year.

Welcoming the award, Belfast Hills Development Manager, Dr Lizzy Pinkerton, said: "The Landscape Partnership Scheme will be the impetus for an ongoing process of growth and development that will result in a sustainable legacy for our landscape and its people.

"We would like to thank our partner organisations who have provided vital support and guidance during the development of this project."

Additional funding for the LP scheme has been provided by a host of organisations including the NI Environmental Agency, the Rural Development Programme and Belfast, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Antrim councils.

Environment Minister, Alex Attwood, said: “I warmly welcome this project and am pleased that the Department of the Environment is able to contribute to it through Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The Belfast Hills Partnership is to be commended on having the vision to make this project a reality. It will make a real difference by protecting and managing the hills landscape over looking Belfast through promoting the heritage of the Belfast Hills and giving local people a valuable opportunity to get involved in a wide range of activities.”

Notes to editors

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.

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £146million to projects across Northern Ireland.