New project to protect and promote historic Chilterns' commons launches 30 September

05/10/2011

An exciting new project to protect and improve historic commons in the Chilterns was launched by the Chilterns Conservation Board on Friday 30 September - largely thanks to a confirmed grant* of just over £403,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Chilterns has nearly 200 commons and they play a vital role in the area's natural and cultural heritage. They've been at the heart of communities since the Middle Ages and hold generations of history in their landscape. As important wildlife refuges, the commons are home to many species that cannot survive elsewhere in our intensively-farmed countryside. They're also fantastic green spaces used by many for walking, picnics and playing on.

However, commons are under threat. Today, there is increasing demand for land from agriculture, housing and commerce, but ironically, the biggest threat to commons is neglect.

The Chilterns Commons Project was launched on 30 September at Totternhoe Knolls near Dunstable. It has £400,000 HLF funding plus £100,000 from local organisations including The Chiltern Society. The Chilterns Conservation Board's four-year project will help to improve the natural environment of the commons across the Chilterns area, spread the word about the value of commons and get more people involved in understanding and caring for them.

A new Commons Project Officer, Rachel Sanderson, is in place to advise and support local groups already caring for their common. She is also encouraging new volunteers to get involved. "We'll be running training schemes for landowners and volunteers to help them acquire new skills such as using brushcutters or researching archaeological features on a common" says Rachel. "We'd love to get lots more people involved in caring for and promoting commons so if you are interested get in touch!".

Practical work to restore valuable wildlife habitats is also major part of the Chilterns Commons Project, along with investigation and repair of their historic heritage.

The real value of commons lies in their importance to the public as open green spaces at the heart of communities. We need to use them, study them, cherish them and most importantly, maintain them so that we don't lose these amazing, varied landscapes for good.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East, said: 'Locals and visitors alike of all ages will benefit widely from this scheme, which aims to increase access and understanding of the natural and cultural profile of Chilterns AONB. We wish the Chilterns Conservation Board every luck with the project.'

Notes to editors

***** The HLF grant to the project Chilterns Commons Project is for £403,000 (75% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

The Chilterns Commons Project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Chilterns Conservation Board, The Chiltern

Society and other partners. The project aims to encourage people to make the most of commons for walking, playing and enjoying the outdoors. It also aims to inspire and enable people to get involved with caring for commons and studying them. The project launched on 30 September 2011 and will run until July 2015. For more information contact Rachel Sanderson on 01844 355 525 or rsanderson@chilternsaonb.org.

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. HLF has supported 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK, To date, HLF has made 90 awards in South Oxfordshire, amounting to just over £8.2million.

The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1965, covers 833 sq kms (326 sq miles) stretching from Goring, in Oxfordshire, to near Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, and has a resident population of 80,000. It is one of 40 AONBs in England and Wales.

The Conservation Board was set up following the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and increase awareness and understanding of the Chilterns AONB. The Board, which also aims to foster the social and economic well being of local communities, is supported by all local authorities in the area and by Natural England, The National Trust and The Chiltern Society.

Further information

For more information about the AONB or the Conservation Board, phone 01844 355 500 or email: office@chilternsaonb.org.

To arrange your visit, or for further information and images contact Claire Forrest at the Chilterns Conservation Board on 01844 355 521 or cforrest@chilternsaonb.org.

Get involved with the Chilterns Commons Project. To find out more contact Rachel Sanderson on 01844 355 525, email rsanderson@chilternsaonb.org or visit www.chilternsaonb.org.