# Three Counties Traditional Orchard project gets the go ahead

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Development funding of £22,100 has been awarded to help the Malvern Hills AONB partnership and partner organisations progress their plans during 2013 and apply for a full grant of £363,500 for a three year project.

The key aims of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard project are to secure greater community interest and involvement in orchards, to conserve their unique heritage and, ultimately, to help to save this iconic and threatened part of the three counties landscape.

The survival of traditional orchards depends on active management. Unfortunately, a great many old orchards are not receiving this, either because they are no longer profitable or because orchard owners do not have access to the labour and / or skills and knowledge that are needed to keep them in good condition.

Research has shown that not only is there demand from orchard owners for guidance and support, but also that many people are willing to volunteer their time locally to help.

Orchards and orchard fruit have been a key element of life and landscape in the three counties for many centuries. Cider and perry from the area was originally in great national demand in the 17th Century and is still extremely popular today. The county emblems – including the apple for Herefordshire and the pear for Worcestershire – testify to their enduring importance to this part of the UK.

Despite huge losses since the 1950s, the three counties still boast the greatest concentration of traditional orchards in Britain, accounting for around a third of all those that survive.

Traditional orchards are undoubtedly visually pleasing in the landscape but they offer so much more besides. Their fruit can still have a value to the local economy, their trees and grassland act as a haven for an abundance of local wildlife and they provide much interest to those with a passion for local history, traditions, archaeology and tree varieties.

Paul Esrich, manager of Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. There is a great need to conserve the traditional orchards of the three counties and this project will equip local people with the skills, knowledge and support which will enable them to do just that."

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "We're extremely pleased to give initial support to this project. It will enable key natural heritage organisations in the Malvern Hills area to help halt the decline of traditional orchards, and contribute to the management of these vulnerable habitats while actively involving local people of all ages in the process. We shall watch the developing plans with interest."

The AONB partnership is keen for orchard owners or potential volunteers with an interest in this project to get in touch. It would also like to hear from those with orchard knowledge, skills or expertise which they would be happy to share them with others. Please contact the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership at aonb@worcestershire.gov.uk.

**Notes to editors**

A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

**AONB Designation**: The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This primary purpose was reaffirmed in a 1991 policy statement on AONBs, (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement 1991, CCP356). The statement also identifies subsidiary purposes which should be taken into account in pursing the primary purpose.

**Malvern Hills AONB**: The Malvern Hills area was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1959. The designation covers 105 square kilometres and includes parts of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Records show that the Malvern Hills Conservators played a key role in ensuring that the area of the AONB is larger than that originally proposed. The area is famed for its dramatic hills and for the pure spring water that flows from them, but it offers so much more besides. A rich cultural heritage of forts, castles and priories stands proudly from this landscape of ancient woodland, rolling pastures and wild, open commons. The geology of the AONB is varied and fascinating and the area is home to a diversity of locally and nationally important wildlife.

The AONB designation signifies that the natural beauty of this area is of national importance. A partnership of local and national interests works together to conserve and enhance the area through the implementation of a five year AONB Management Plan. The Malvern Hills AONB is one of a family of 46 similarly designated areas across the United Kingdom. For further information, please vist the Malvern Hills AONB website.

**For further information**

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