

A Milky Way panorama above Kielder Observatory Kielder Observatory

A new observatory is to be built in Northumberland International Dark Sky Park, thanks to support from National Lottery players.

The award-winning Kielder Observatory, now in its ninth year, has raised over £200,000, including £89,700 from HLF and £86,934 from the Rural Development Programme for England: LEADER programme, to build a state-of-the-art new facility.

The project is the first step towards creating an internationally recognised Astronomy Village, which would be the first of its kind in the UK. Northumberland International Dark Sky Park is the third largest Dark Sky Park in the world and the new observatory will be a significant boost to the region’s cultural offer, allowing thousands more visitors a year to the site.

A better way to see the stars

The new observatory will be fully equipped and accessible, housing a fully automated telescope with retractable roof, presentation room for learning and community activities, kitchen and toilet facilities. In addition, there will be an external observation deck for outdoor stargazing.

Work will start on the new observatory in the next few weeks to enable the facility to be up and running by late summer.

Gary Fildes, Founder Director and Lead Astronomer of Kielder Observatory, said: “This new observatory will enable the science team to provide even more resources to the community who visit us. Our aim is to “Enthuse Educate and Inspire” all of our visitors and with the support of our partners across this wonderful region we will continue to excel."

Full STEAM ahead

The observatory will also have the chance to pilot STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) activities on site and further afield. The project will involve workshops with visiting schools, colleges and community groups from right across the North East.

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: “Kielder Observatory is a hugely valuable asset for the North East and continues to grow in popularity each year. We’re delighted that National Lottery players can support this project to expand the observatory and enable more people to witness and learn about the outstanding natural heritage of Northumberland.”