Sandwell in the spotlight thanks to National Lottery

Take part in activities at the nature reserve at Sandwell Valley RSPB Sandwell Valley RSPB

Prior to 2013, Sandwell had not benefitted from HLF support as greatly as other parts of the West Midlands. It was decided to make the borough, one of three priority development areas in the region.

Between April 2013 and October 2018 HLF has awarded no fewer than 46 new grants totalling more than £6million thanks to money raised by National Lottery players.

In addition to this new investment into the area, a further £4.19million National Lottery funding was confirmed in 2013 for the delivery of two major projects in Sandwell.

Sandwell's flagship award saw £3.8m to support the restoration of **Lightwoods Park and House**. Rescued from serious decay, the Grade II listed House dating back to 1791, has been restored to its former glory. It is now a popular high-quality venue for a wide range of community activities as well as public and private events.

Meanwhile the surrounding park has seen numerous historical elements brought back to life, including drinking fountains, the 19th century bandstand and the unusual Shakespeare Garden, featuring plants and shrubs from the Bard's plays. The restoration was carried out by Sandwell Borough Council and was boosted by a further £1.5m from the Big Lottery.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was given £630,000 to improve its **Sandwell Valley Nature Reserve**, a site teeming with more than 200 bird species and many more hundreds of plants and butterflies. The grant meant that a larger, better visitor centre could be built, replacing an earlier building that had been devastated in an arson attack in 2010.

The project has also enabled the RSPB to attract volunteers and publicise more widely the much loved 10-hectare site that provides a vital ecological habitat just outside Birmingham.

Sandwell Citizens Advocacy received just over £85,000 for its **Living Memory** project to share the unique photography collections and life stories from the diverse communities across the Black Country.

The work, which is well underway, is busy documenting different aspects of everyday life that have been captured through people's own photographs. The images hidden in family albums, stored away in shoeboxes, and treasured in the collections of local enthusiasts can all offer rich perspectives on a rapidly changing society. A special website has been created, more than 50 workshops hosted, 60 personal stories shared, more than 900 historic photographs are been professionally archived, and a travelling exhibition put together.

A much more modest but no less important HLF-supported project was **Within Walking Distance** – Landmarks of Langley, which help the local community celebrate the unique heritage of their area. Centred on Langley Library, where the Friends group was given a £9,800 grant, the project mapped out twenty-four historical landmarks within a square mile, revealing the story of this living and working environment over the past 170 years.

Local people explored different aspects of heritage through workshops, presentations and displays. A travelling exhibition will have visited several venues by January when elements of it go on permanent display at Langley Library. An animated film with poetry composed by Black Country poet Emma Purshouse is available on YouTube and local primary school children went on guided walks led by older members of the community sharing information across the generations.

Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: "Our focus on Sandwell as a priority area for funding over the past six years has resulted in a fantastic range of projects that have transformed so many aspects of local history and heritage. And we have the generosity of National Lottery players to thank for making this possible."

The National Lottery has awarded a total of £23.25m to 162 projects in Sandwell between November 1994 and March 2018.

Further information and images

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