All Hands on Hedges for new Heritage Project

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A new project to raise awareness of the importance of hedgerows to our local landscapes is to get underway following the award of a £47,400 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The funding was awarded to the Hedge Laying Association of Ireland for a project that will promote the traditional skill of hedgelaying through research, practical demonstrations and hands on training.

The 'Hands on Hedges' project will research the tradition of hedge laying by revisiting the sites toured by George Midgley, a hedge layer from Yorkshire, during his visit to Northern Ireland in the 1930s where he demonstrated the technique on a number of farms at the request of the Committee for Agriculture. The original hedgerows laid during Midgley's demonstrations will be identified and surveyed, and the findings used to compare management techniques.

Northern Ireland has very few skilled hedge layers and the project includes a programme of activities and events to encourage more people to become involved in this traditional skill. Farmers, landowners, estate managers, community groups, schools and universities from across Northern Ireland will participate in workshops and training courses to demonstrate hedgerow management and laying techniques. A number of candidates will also undertake a training programme which will enable them to achieve an accredited qualification in hedge laying.

"The Hedge Laying Association is delighted to receive this award. Interest in the appropriate management of hedgerows is growing and many people are keen to learn the old skills. Thanks to the support of HLF we will be in a position to provide a level of education and training that would not be possible otherwise", said Project Coordinator David Thompson.

Commenting on the award, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "Hedgerows enhance the unique beauty of our countryside and their conservation and management, in addition to being good farming practice, is essential to creating a sustainable habit for a variety of wildlife. We are delighted to be involved in this project which will raise awareness of the importance of hedgerows and enable local communities to help conserve these natural heritage assets".

For more information about HLF and its funding programmes, visit www.hlf.org.uk or telephone 028 9031 0120.