Bid to save wild landscapes

04/02/2013

Inspired by a once in a lifetime opportunity to save some of the most threatened wild landscapes in Dorset, conservationists and the community are joining forces to launch Wildlink, linking people and wildlife across the whole east Dorset conurbation.

Wildlink is a major Living Landscape project around the urban areas of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch, involving conservation organisations, local authorities, private landowners and the local community. The kickstart to Wildlink will be the purchase of 581 hectares (1435 acres) of land currently for sale by the Canford Estate. Dorset Wildlife Trust has formed a consortium of partners to purchase the land, which encompasses internationally important heathland, saltmarsh and reedbeds, ancient woodland and important grassland, with the intention of improving access for people as well as ensuring protection of its outstanding wildlife.

The Wildlink project aims to build on this to promote the management of a much wider linking area between the New Forest National Park and the Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area, a haven for people to enjoy and get close to wildlife. The HLF funding provides initial support in the development of the full project.

Brian Bleese, Director of Operations and Development at Dorset Wildlife Trust, said: “This is the first time that such a group has come together for the greater good of the whole area and, thanks to this funding, the partnership will be the core of the even more ambitious aim of benefiting all the land that surrounds these sites, with increased co-operation and increased involvement by local people in looking after and discovering their natural heritage. We are committed to improving access for people to their fantastic natural heritage and securing it for future generations.”

Richard Bellamy, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “This project covers an amazing range of key habitats and in terms of biodiversity ticks lots of boxes! The Heritage Lottery Fund is pleased to be supporting Dorset Wildlife Trust’s initial plans to protect an important network of sites with the aim of securing their long-term management and encouraging surrounding urban communities to get more involved with the natural heritage right on their doorstep.”

The land for sale includes part of Upton Heath, land at Ferndown and Parley Commons, woodland and heath in Corfe Mullen and Poole and shoreline and harbour at Holes and Lytchett Bays. The Wildlink consortium has a year to raise enough money to secure the purchase. The consortium partners have already contributed a 7 figure sum and a major local and national appeal will be launched in the spring to raise the remaining £500,000, as well as a second stage funding bid to HLF. Partners in the Wildlink consortium include Dorset Wildlife Trust, the Erica Trust, Poole Harbour Commissioners, Borough of Poole, Dorset County Council Countryside Service and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust.

Notes to editors

Working for a secure future for Dorset’s wildlife enriching the quality of life. Dorset Wildlife Trust is part of the Natural Weymouth and Portland Partnership; connecting people with nature.

Dorset Wildlife Trust works to champion wildlife and natural places, to engage and inspire people and to promote sustainable living. Founded in 1961, DWT is now the largest voluntary nature conservation organisation in Dorset, with

over 25,000 members and over 40 nature reserves. Most are open daily and there are visitor centres providing a wealth of wildlife information at Brooklands Farm, Lorton Meadows, Kingcombe Meadows and Brownsea Island Nature Reserves, The Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve and the Urban Wildlife Centre at Upton Heath Nature Reserve. DWT plays a key role in dealing with local environmental issues and leads the way in establishing the practices of sustainable development and engaging new audiences in conservation, particularly in the urban areas.

Wildlink – an Urban Living Landscape in Dorset will deliver the following exciting objectives:

- To provide enhanced opportunities for visitors and local residents to enjoy and learn about the area's fantastic natural heritage
- To improve physical access to local green space close to high density urban area
- To develop relationships with local landowners in order to enhance conservation management of land in private ownership and to open up access to more greenspace in the area
- To provide increased involvement and volunteering opportunities for people in a variety of wildlife habitats on the urban margin
- To improve access to the marine environment on the fringes of Poole Harbour to improve its conservation value and increase public awareness and enjoyment.

Sites include land at Hampreston and High Mead Lane, Award Road, Ferndown Common, Delph Wood, Arrowsmith Copse, Dunyeats Hill, Corfe Lodge Road, Upton Heath, Beacon Hill, Cottage Farm (Happy Bottom), Ashington Paddock, Barrow Hill, Wimborne Road, Rushcombe Bottom, Parley Common, Tricketts Cross, Lytchett Bay and Holes Bay.

The full Wildlink Project cost will be £4.3million, we have already secured £1.6million, are applying for 2nd stage funding of £2.2million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and need to raise a further £500,000 by public appeal.

Further information

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