£3 million boost for Dorset's spectacular countryside

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The South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, made up of 14 local organisations led by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), is an innovative mix of archaeologists, artists, historians, landowners, naturalists, teachers and, most importantly local people. Everyone has come together to safeguard the South Dorset Ridgeway landscape, help people enjoy it and feel pride for an area that many experts consider as important as that around Stonehenge.

The partnership will deliver a range of activity over the next five years, valued at nearly £3m, including: support for landowners to help wildlife, such as butterflies and Grey Partridge; create better access to the high ground of the Ridgeway so that more people can enjoy the breathtaking views; an exciting events programme including 'Inside Out Dorset' in 2014; help for schools to use the landscape as an 'outside classroom'; cutting edge digital media projects to fire the imagination and breathing life back into local song and traditional crafts.

Phil Collins, newly appointed member of the Heritage Lottery Fund's South West Committee, said: "As a new member of the Heritage Lottery Fund's South West Committee, I was thrilled to see such an amazing project at my first meeting! This area is so important in terms of biodiversity and is a huge asset to the South West's tourist offer. HLF's investment will help conserve this precious 'landscape of our ancestors', ensuring people from near and far can better understand its history and, most importantly, help them enjoy one of the most diverse Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes in Europe."

Andy Foot, Chairman of the Dorset AONB Partnership and local farmer, said: "This landscape has been shaped by people that have lived and farmed here for 6,000 years. The challenge for us is how we will shape it for the future. The South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership Scheme provides abundant opportunities for the people who live and work here to enjoy this landscape, feel pride in it and make their own contribution to ensure this place retains its special character in a changing, modern world."

The first opportunities to get involved will start later this summer, to find out more visit South Dorset Ridgeway Partnership website, Twitter: @LandBoneStones.

Notes to editors

Members of HLF's Committee for the South West are chosen for their wide range of experience and local knowledge. Responsible for making decisions on regional applications to the fund from £50,000 to £2million, the committee are supported by the regional HLF team for the South West, who operate from Exeter based office.

Over the last 30 years, Phil Collins has worked for environmental and heritage organisations, including Government agencies, local authorities, museums, environmental and architectural consultancies and the charitable sector. He is a qualified landscape architect, historic buildings conservation specialist, museum professional and ecologist.

Phil has a strong interest in increasing public understanding of the management and value of the historic and natural environments and their cultural importance. He was a member of the SW Historic Environment Forum and is a trustee

for the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural Environment at Haldon, Exeter.

HLF's Landscape Partnerships are helping bring together members of the community as well as local, regional, and national organisations to deliver schemes which benefit some of the UK's most outstanding landscapes and rural communities. Grants currently range from £250,000 up to £2m. From 2013, this range changes to £100,000 up to £3m. The next closing date for LP applications is May 2013.

The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of a national family of protected landscapes.

- The Dorset AONB Partnership brings together 20 organisations to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of this nationally important landscape. The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers over 40% of the county, and is one of a family of 49 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The AONB stretches from Lyme Regis in the west, along the coast to Poole Harbour in the east, and north to Hambledon Hill near Blandford Forum. It covers over half of Poole Harbour, including Brownsea and the smaller islands. Outside of the harbour, the designated area ends at mean low water. The AONB includes small areas in Somerset and Devon.
- The Dorset AONB is one of the most heavily populated AONBs, with c.70,000 people living within the boundary and approximately 1.35million people living within 20miles of the boundary. A number of market and coastal towns lie within the AONB, including Lyme Regis, Bridport, Beaminster and Swanage.

The South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership area takes in the high ground between Dorset's county town of Dorchester and the Georgian resort town of Weymouth. The roughly rectangular area is approximately 7km from north to south and 17km from west to east. The area is bordered by the English Channel to the south and the River Frome valley to the north; from the villages of West Bexington in the west to Poxwell in the east.

The South Dorset Ridgeway provides an introduction to the best that the British countryside has to offer. It is home to a remarkable ancient ceremonial landscape, mixed with some of the most spectacular scenery in the UK. The South Dorset Ridgeway deserves to be explored further and for its rich heritage; to become more widely understood.

The challenge for the landscape partnership scheme is to engage the wider population so that many more are aware of the remarkable landscape that lies on their doorstep.

Further information

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