History flows through Havant estate

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Thanks to a £283,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), a 4km stretch of the Hermitage Stream will become the source of a three-year project run by Groundwork Solent.

Go With The Flow will work closely with the community living near to the stream which passes through the Leigh Park estate. During its history the watercourse has had connections with prehistoric settlement, a Roman road, a country house estate, Second World War military camps and temporary accommodation for refugees forced to leave nearby Portsmouth due to wartime bombing. Following the war the area witnessed the construction of what was believed to be the largest housing estate in the country.

The stream links the area directly with the coast at Langstone Harbour and is an important wildlife corridor for fish, bird life and a wide range of plants. In recent years parts of the harsh urban environment with culverted concrete walls have been replaced with more natural, gently sloping banks.

Using the grant money, Groundwork Solent will appoint a project officer to work with local schools, colleges, and adult and family learning centres to develop educational materials and to use the stream as an 'outdoor classroom'. Community volunteers will be recruited to undertake a range of tasks that include creating a special map and guidebook as well as helping with guided walks and activity days for the whole community. A special attraction will be a treasure hunt using map references and smartphones. These will help treasure hunters to track down 'geocaches' hidden around the stream and containing 'finds' relating to the stream's history and the natural world.

Volunteer help will also be used to improve access to the paths around the stream and to tackle litter problems. Local residents have already shown their support for improvement work by setting up a Friends group.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "Havant is a priority area for HLF so we are delighted to support this imaginative project where the stream takes centre stage as a means of strengthening community involvement. There will be plenty of opportunities for people to learn new skills, find out more about their neighbourhood and help to look after the natural environment."

For Groundwork Solent, Ian Ayres, said: "Community support for the bid was brilliant. We're delighted funding from Heritage Lottery Fund will turn the Hermitage Stream into an outdoor classroom and a place to get together over the next few years."

MP for Havant, David Willetts, welcomed the news. He said: "This is a really valuable project. The Hermitage Stream has already been much improved with less concrete and more natural embankment. Learning more about its history will further bring it to life."

Notes to editors

The Hermitage Stream and three tributaries cover a catchment area of 19 sq km. The total stream length is 7km with 4 of these the subject of this project. The width of the stream varies from 2 to 4 metres.

The Leigh Park Estate, although situated in the Borough of Havant, was built by the City of Portsmouth after the Second World War using garden city principles.

Havant is a priority area for Heritage Lottery Fund South East England. We are working with Havant Borough Council and Havant Council of Community Service to encourage applications from across the borough.

Further information

For further information about grant availability for projects in Havant, contact the Heritage Lottery Fund South East development team, phone: 020 7591 6171, email: southeastengland@hlf.org.uk.

HLF Press Office: Laura Bates, 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk or Phil Cooper on 07889 949 173.

Groundwork Solent, Ian Ayres on 02392 617 020.