Local Landscapes in Lottery Windfall

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The earmarked first-round passes* of over £1.6million for the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and £1.2million for the Belfast Hills were made through HLF's Landscape Partnership (LP) programme, part of a total £17million boost for the UK's heritage.

The LP programme helps to protect some of the UK's most treasured landscapes by acting as a catalyst to bring communities and organisations together to form partnerships that create a shared vision and help implement local action for the conservation and management of our landscape heritage. Each scheme contains a portfolio of projects that provide long term social, economic and environmental benefits for the areas. Over the last six years, £72million has been invested through this innovative programme.

Commenting on the announcement, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "This is fantastic news for two of our outstanding landscapes. The Mourne AONB and the Belfast Hills are valuable heritage assets and today's announcement is an endorsement of these ambitious plans which can now be further developed to conserve and manage these landscapes and enable local communities to reconnect to, and benefit from, all aspects of their local heritage."

The Mourne AONB is famous throughout the world for its scenic landscapes, iconic dry stone walls and majestic mountains. The upland core that gives the area its most enduring image is home to a large number of priority species including red grouse, juniper, the keeled skimmer, sundew and butterwort, and its natural beauty is combined with a wealth of cultural heritage and an industrial past rich in traditional skills that include farming, granite quarrying and the construction of reservoirs.

The LP scheme will focus on reconnecting people to both the natural and cultural heritage of the Mourne Mountain Kingdom with opportunities to learn traditional skills and take part in volunteering activities. Many of the natural features that give the Mourne AONB its unique landscape character will be restored through projects to control scrub and invasive species and reestablish Mourne Juniper. Plans have also been developed to conserve and interpret aspects of the distinct built heritage including a 'Watertown' dwelling, Water Towers and historic Mourne Walls and Smithies. The management of the land will be improved through more effective liaison between landowners and it is hoped that this scheme will lay the foundations for robust public participation and engagement with all stakeholders in the Mourne area.

Martin Carey, CEO of the Mourne Heritage Trust, said: "This is an opportunity to make a step change in both conservation and appreciation of the unique heritage of which Mourne people are rightly proud – and of which we hope they will become prouder still. As well as a landscape of striking beauty and an idyllic retreat, the uplands were for generations a hive of industry and in many ways are still a life support to the communities that surround them. We feel that the physical legacy of this still evolving industrial heritage - and the stories that go with it - should be preserved for the future, while the natural features appreciated by people from near and far are also enhanced. MHT is delighted that a wide ranging partnership of community and statutory interests and landowners has coalesced to take forward the care and sustainable development of the Mourne mountains. The funding provided by HLF will be instrumental in giving effect to the enthusiasm and good intentions within that group."

Comprising 4,400ha of upland landscape, the Belfast Hills frame the city and the neighbouring communities of urban north and west Belfast, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and rural Antrim. The landscape is home to scheduled monuments, archaeology and habitats and derives much of its character from its unique position as an urban oasis for the surrounding local communities.

The acquisition of the Divis and Black Mountain site along with projects at Slievenacloy, Colin Glen and Ligoniel has created a portfolio of projects which this scheme will bring together, along with local landowners and community groups, to improve the management and increase the protection of the wider Belfast Hills. The scheme will increase access to the landscape through the provision of new routes, the repair and upgrade of current pathways and improved linkages between the many natural heritage sites. The local community will be encouraged to become actively involved, with plans in place to provide up to 3,000 volunteer days in activities such as walking, species surveying, landscape photography and visitor guiding. A schools education programme will also be developed to involve local children and young people in the rich heritage of the Hills.

Jim Bradley, Manager of the Belfast Hills Partnership, said: “This is a wonderful boost for the Belfast Hills and is the culmination of a great deal of work and effort by our Partnership to secure the major funding that’s required for the Belfast Hills area. At a time when many organizations - including our own - are having major core funding cuts, it is a great boost to secure vital project funding and be able to put the hills on the map in terms of its heritage, landscape and also local employment. We are delighted to be taking this project into the future.”

Notes to editors

* A Landscape Partnership (LP) earmarked first-round pass means that money has been set aside by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the scheme in question. Competition at this stage is tough, and while it does not guarantee funding, it is an indication of positive support. The applicant then progresses to the second round and submits a further, fully-developed application to secure the full award. This early level of strong financial commitment means that LPs can build strong partnerships with the assurance that funding for their scheme is in place provided that their final proposals fully meet the programme's criteria.

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 range from £250,000 up to £2m.

To date, HLF has awarded £416m to over 2,785 projects for support of the UK's natural heritage.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further Information

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