Lott-o money for old woodland

21/05/2012

Endangered woodlands at Drumnaph are to be protected following the announcement of over £512,000 of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Led by Carntogher Community Association (CCA), the project will purchase 130 acres of land near Maghera. The area not only contains ecologically significant habitats and trees dating back to the 1600s, but also includes two iron age forts.

The new site is situated adjacent to the Drumnaph woodland site, which was acquired and is managed by the Woodland Trust with previous grants from HLF. This project will create a larger publically accessible woodland site and secure the future of the trees and rich heritage of the site.

Described as a wildlife haven, the woodland site is home to sparrowhawks, buzzards, otters, Irish hare, and wading birds including lapwing, curlew and snipe. Of the 130 acres, around 1/5 of the land is important woodland, the rest containing ecologically significant habitats such as grazing meadows, wetlands, river bank habitats and rare quaking bog* which is listed in the Habitats Directive. The directive is the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy, aiming to protect over 1,000 animals and plant species, and over 200 habitat types.

The project will see the implementation of a ten year management plan to meet the requirements of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, commented on the funding: “This woodland was at significant risk of destruction if it had not been purchased by CCA. Northern Ireland has very little woodland cover, only 6% compared to an average 12% for the rest of the UK. We are pleased to be able to help secure the future of site and consolidate our earlier investment in the biodiversity of Drumnaph. CCA have recognised the importance of linking people back to their heritage and this project will not only equip volunteers with ecological conservation skills but will also provide a good practice model for community management of woodland, wetland, and grazing habitats.

The Northern Ireland Environmental Agency (NIEA), which recognises the biodiversity value of the area, emphasised the importance of the land as part of a wider network of habitats. Commenting on the funding Graham Seymour, Director of Natural Heritage, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, said: "NIEA is pleased to be able to contribute £255,000 to this project to complement the funding allocated by HLF. We believe that this important heritage asset will be best safeguarded by bringing it into community ownership and stewardship. It will add to the adjacent Woodland Trust Reserve and will provide an opportunity for the local community to take responsibility for the management of the biodiversity of this diverse area which contains several Northern Ireland priority habitats including native woodland, lowland raised bog and purple-moor and rush pasture."

Including the CCA’s existing 90 registered volunteers, the scheme will train up school children, university students, conservation groups and new community volunteers. They will help carry out research, gather information and gain management skills in conservation, including pre-project health and safety training.

Niall O’Kane of Carntogher Community Association added: “This is a dream come true for the local Community Association. This is a grass-roots, community-driven project that will provide the opportunity for the entire community to get involved in a landmark heritage project over the coming years. This will bring the size of the Drumnaph reserve to over 200 acres, giving a critical mass of inter-linked habitats that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the reserve. The involvement of the wider community in developing access and managing the reserve will also help develop the sense of community ownership, further underpining its long-term sustainability for generations to come.”

Note to editors

*Quaking bog is a form of bog occurring in wetter parts of valley bogs and raised bogs, and sometimes around the edges of acidic lakes where bog is beginning to form. The bog vegetation forms a mat half a metre or so thick, floating over water or very wet peat. Walking on this surface causes it to move – larger movements may cause visible ripples of the surface, or they may even make trees sway.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Agency within the Department of the Environment. NIEA administers the Natural Heritage Grants Programme to support projects in Northern Ireland to encourage the conservation and enhancement of key elements of the environment and its wildlife, and the provision of facilities which help as wide a range of people as possible to enjoy and appreciate our natural heritage.

Further information

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