Multi-million pound boost for outstanding Lough Neagh landscape

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The unique natural, cultural and built heritage of Lough Neagh and its environs is to be explored, protected and enjoyed as part of a major new five-year project which was awarded a £2.58million grant through HLF's Landscape Partnership programme.

Over the last decade the Landscape Partnership programme has provided £160million to protect some of the UK's most outstanding landscapes. Today's announcement brings to eight the total number of local landscapes to benefit from HLF funding, and comes just weeks after the award of a £1.6million grant for a new Landscape Partnership scheme in the Glens of Antrim.

In the centre of Northern Ireland, Lough Neagh is bounded by five counties and is the largest freshwater lake in the UK and Ireland. It is a distinct landscape made up of wetland habitat and is home to a wide variety of plant and animal life – it even has its own species of trout (Dollaghan), freshwater herring (Pollan) and the Lough Neagh Fly. The new Landscape Partnership scheme will bring the local lough-shore communities and public bodies together to identify and tackle the needs of this unique landscape in a co-ordinated and practical way. It will include lots of projects to conserve and manage the heritage of the area, and planned activities include the development of a heritage trail along the entire shoreline, archaeological digs and workshops and wetland and peat land conservation.

Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, said: "The shoreline and islands of Lough Neagh have a distinct landscape character and a rich, but little known heritage. The area is hugely important as a home to a host of wildlife, and for providing a place for people to enjoy water and outdoor activities. It also has a strong community who are keen to play their part in securing the long term future of the Lough, its heritage and economic potential.

"We were delighted to be able to support yet another important piece of Northern Ireland's diverse and beautiful landscape through our Landscape Partnership programme. Our landscapes are the bedrocks of our heritage, communities and tourism and are worthy of this investment of not only funding but the focus and energy of all the organisations and communities involved in the partnerships."

Welcoming news of the award, The Honourable Shane O'Neill, Chairman of Lough Neagh Partnership Project, said: "We are delighted that Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded a Landscape Partnership grant to Lough Neagh. Lough Neagh has a very rich and diverse natural, cultural and built heritage and we look forward to developing the project with our partners including RSPB, NIEA, other government departments, the seven councils around the Lough, local communities and the River Bann and Lough Neagh Association."

Notes to editors

A Landscape Partnership earmarked grant means that money has been set aside by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the scheme in question. 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 Landscape Partnerships 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 £100,000 to £3m. The next closing date for applications is May 2014 for decisions in October 2014.

The nine landscapes receiving support are:

- East Wight, the eastern tip of the Isle of Wight and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Coigach and Assynt, a beautiful and remote part of North West Scotland
- The New Forest, extensive ancient woodland and heathland with a strong surrounding community
- Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, the largest fresh water lake in the British Isles
- Rusland Valley and Fells, in the South Lake District National Park with a strong link to the traditional coppicing industry
- Derwent Valley, a coalfield area left behind by deindustrialisation which aims to harness the potential of its heritage for positive change and tourism
- Ingleborough Dales, a limestone landscape in the Craven district of the Yorkshire Dales National Park
- Humberhead Levels in South Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, a rare internationally important wetland landscape characterised by significant remains of medieval strip farming and famous for its peatlands
- North York Moors, home of the pioneering ironstone industry and the early development of railways

Further information

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