Project will open up Hardy’s beloved home

05/12/2012

Built on the edge of Thorncombe Wood, where the Dorset countryside rangers’ building is currently placed, the new visitor centre will be also have improved access to the cottage where Hardy was born.

The timber-built visitor centre will introduce visitors with information about Thomas Hardy and the nearby landscape which influenced his work.

Sensitively designed to have minimal impact on its setting, the new centre will have space for school and community groups to use as well as a small catering area with toilets and some retail space.

The project will also involve setting up more interactive activities and events to help visitors learn about Thomas Hardy’s life and work, as well as the conservation operations needed to look after the area.

Councillor Robert Gould, Cabinet Member for the Environment at Dorset County Council, said: "It’s great that we now have secured funding for this exciting project. Our aim has been to share the place and land that Thomas Hardy loved and drew inspiration from. The development will also mean that more facilities will be available for visitors to the site.

“Thomas Hardy had such a strong link to the place he lived and the landscapes that inspired him. We would like to use the project to help people learn more about Thomas Hardy and his writing, and relate it to the surrounding landscape.”

Helen Sharp, the National Trust Fund-raising Manager, said: “We are really grateful for the support of Heritage Lottery Fund for this project. Thomas Hardy is a well respect literary figure around the world and through this we can improve the way visitors to Hardy’s Birthplace understand him, his works and especially how his beloved Dorset influenced him throughout his life.”

Richard Bellamy, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “Far from the Madding Crowd and Tess of the d’Urbervilles are among the most famous works by literary great, Thomas Hardy, and have been inspiring aspiring authors and book-lovers across the world for many years. This project to improve visitor facilities will help to bring together his birthplace and the surrounding picturesque landscape for the first time helping people to better understand how his Dorset roots influenced his achievements. HLF are sure that the new facilities will help Hardy’s legacy live on well into the future.”

Work is planned to start in September 2013 and for the new visitor centre to open by Easter 2014.

Notes to editors

The organisations will be increasing the number of volunteer opportunities available at Hardy’s birthplace.

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