Natural heritage of historic site opened up

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The grant was awarded to Outdoor Recreation NI and will be used to increase access to the extensive grounds and interpret the natural, cultural and built heritage of this historic site.

Tobar Mhuire has a rich cultural heritage primarily surrounding the manor house, the church and grounds which was for generations the estate of the Crossgar family. Originally called Crossgar House, the manor house was first built in 1813 and has a colourful past that includes use as a base for storing rum and tobacco and for gun-running. Occupied by American and British troops during the Second World War, the house is believed to be the site of one of the seven ancient chapels of Kilmore, dating from 800 AD. It is presently a modern day retreat and conference centre run by the Passionist Order.

The new project will open up and increase access to the site by creating 3km of sustainable heritage trails that will be suitable for walking and cycling. An eco trail will also be created and through this network local people will be able to actively participate in outdoor recreation and engage with the natural environment. A series of interpretation panels will be installed to share the heritage of the site and enable people to learn more about the biodiversity and natural heritage of the area as well as the history of Crossgar.

Local community volunteers will play a key role in the development and delivery of the project by researching the local heritage, developing educational resources for the eco trail, clearing trail corridors, acting as volunteer trail rangers and training as Community Walk Leaders.

After completion, Tobar Mhuire will host an outreach programme of regular activities such as guided walks, treasure hunts for families, heritage open days, nature counts and other organised events in conjunction with local groups and organisations including the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

Commenting on the award, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: “This fantastic project will increase access to and knowledge of this important local heritage asset. The network of trails and programme to attract volunteers and encourage participation will enable local people to really get involved in creating better recreational facilities at the site, and we are delighted to support this project.”

Outdoor Recreation NI is an organisation responsible for developing, managing and promoting outdoor activities including walking, cycling, canoeing and adventure activities throughout Northern Ireland. Outdoor Recreation NI will work in partnership with the Passionist Order to deliver the project objectives, and said: “Outdoor Recreation NI are delighted to receive funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to enhance the recreation and interpretation of the unique heritage of Tobar Mhuire, which a gem within the Crossgar area. This funding will enable Outdoor Recreation NI to create access to this highly-in-demand resource by the local community, families and young people alike, and the trails and ecotrail will allow all users to engage with the natural landscape and discover the rich heritage of Tobar Mhuire on their doorstep.”

Additional partnership funding for the project has also been provided by the Rural Development Programme (RDP) through the Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP), Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) and Tobar Mhuire Monastry.