£7.8M HLF grant to open up Northumberland's



A visual of the final design concepts for the Sill, produced by architects Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall

Located in the heart of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site in Northumberland National Park, the Sill will become the country's first national landscape discovery centre, giving more people than ever before, the chance to experience the countryside's special and often hidden treasures.

Just like a sat-nav that helps you find your destination, the Sill will direct people to the places that may seem out of reach or difficult to find. It will revolutionise everyone's ability to find and experience nature and the great outdoors, inspiring, involving and engaging people from all walks of life in the natural and cultural heritage of Northumberland.

The Sill will deliver a comprehensive programme of interpretation, education, research and events that will inspire people to celebrate, value and conserve the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Northumberland landscape. It will attract more than 100,000 visitors each year, and will offer an all-weather and year-round facility that provides hostel accommodation, retail facilities and a café.

Spearheaded by Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and YHA (England and Wales), the lead partners are celebrating the latest stage of all the hard work and dedication by the people and organisations involved in this flagship project.

Northumberland National Park is home to some of England's darkest skies, cleanest rivers, ancient landscapes, rich culture and heritage and breath-taking scenery. Recent national opinion polls show that 89% of people strongly support National Parks but these polls also show a large decline in visits from young people and less wealthy people who didn't know as much about national parks and their importance to the nation.

Representatives from HLF, NNPA, YHA and Northumberland County Council, today came together to celebrate the decision and all that the Sill will bring to the area. The partners hope this achievement will act as a springboard to help raise the remaining £2.2million funds needed to ensure the project reaches its full potential.

John Riddle, Chairman of Northumberland National Park Authority, hailed this moment as an historic one for the region. He said: "We are absolutely delighted by today's announcement. To receive such substantial HLF backing is a wonderful boost for the project and marks a very significant day for the North East."

Tony Gates, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, claims the project will transform how people will learn about and explore our landscapes. He said: "The great outdoors is important to people, it enriches our lives, it makes us feel alive. The Sill will help people from all walks of life explore and learn about Britain's finest landscapes. Through this project, we will inspire the next generation of custodians, protecting the legacy of our stunning landscapes for the future. We are particularly keen to ensure young people benefit, with The Sill as our answer to the ipad in helping grab young peoples' attention.

"We're very grateful to the organisations and individuals who have supported the project in helping us get this far, it's been a real team effort and we will need their ongoing support to ensure The Sill delivers to its full potential and the maximum number of people benefit from a connection with our heritage."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "With the famous Hadrian's Wall and much more besides on the doorstep, this new state-of-the-art discovery centre will become the perfect base from which to explore the national park's unquestionable beauty. The Heritage Lottery Fund's investment is also supporting a year-round programme of exhibitions and activities that will ensure that visitors are tempted back to Northumberland again and again, providing a much-needed boost to the local economy."

Caroline White, Chief Executive of YHA (England and Wales), said: "The announcement of funding from HLF is a huge step forward for the Sill. HLF funding, together with that from other providers, has closed the funding gap significantly. It is immensely exciting that we are now within touching distance of transforming the current YHA site at Once Brewed and creating a nationally significant landscape discovery centre which will ensure that young people can continue to enjoy exciting outdoor experiences in Northumberland National Park."

Councillor Grant Davey, Leader of Northumberland County Council, said: "This is fantastic news for Northumberland. The Sill will become a superb asset to help us achieve our ambitions to attract even more visitors to the county each year. We've worked closely with Northumberland National Park to support the development of the project and I'm delighted that the hard work of all the partners has paid off. Its great news for the whole of Northumberland and means over 100 new jobs will be created. The economic and community benefits will be transformational through providing new training, skills, business growth and volunteering opportunities."

Guy Opperman, MP, also expressed his support for the project: "I support the Sill project wholeheartedly. I have seen the designs and met the team. This will be a great addition to Northumberland."

Through the Sill, young people will have the opportunity to learn about and explore the countryside, as pupils from Bridgewater School, Scotswood Road in Newcastle's West End, discovered on a recent visit to Northumberland National Park.

Deputy Head at Bridgewater School, Jennifer Stoker, commented: "The staff from Northumberland National Park facilitated a wonderful experience for our children from inner-city Newcastle. The children were fascinated by the beautiful views and wildlife and they were in awe of the thousands of years of history. This was a fantastic opportunity for our children and I am sure the sense of awe and wonder will stay with them. It has also inspired their creativity and they can't wait to be involved in designing and creating their willow sculptures! The Sill is a fantastic project which will open doors to the beautiful Northumberland National Park and create lasting memories as well as opportunities for children."

Learning, training and providing real life working and studying experiences is a key part of the Sill. Stuart Evans, The Sill Project Director explained: "All contractors working on the Sill are being asked to provide young people with a learning and work experience – that is we must use this project to improve learning. Samantha, a student working for planning consultants Cundall told me how working on such an interesting development has influenced her career choice and allowed her to implement and expand knowledge gained at university and attaining insight into the challenges faced in practice."

Businesses will feel the benefits of the Sill – a shop window for all that they have to offer. John Hartshorne is a co-founder of Albion Outdoors, specialists in outdoor education and biological fieldwork for school groups across Northumberland. He said: "Where our business is concerned, we anticipate our expansion through the Sill, would have a positive impact on other businesses, in particular working with local accommodation providers to facilitate overnight stays for fieldwork courses around the National Park."

The HLF grant will help to secure the future of this ambitious project, with construction expected to begin on site later this year. The activity programme will start in autumn 2015 and the Sill national landscape discovery building will open its doors to the public in June 2017.

Notes to editors

The Sill
The £14.2m Sill project will become the UK's first dedicated Landscape Discovery Centre. It will form a hub of extensive learning, participation and research activities – some 30,000 days a year. This will make the Sill a leading heritage education facility for landscape, conservation, countryside management, and leisure and tourism skills.

The current funding shortfall is £2.2m.

A major purpose of the Sill is to enable the landscapes of Northumberland National Park and surrounding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be opened up to a broad range of new audiences, including disadvantaged children, families, older people, disabled people and those less confident at exploring natural places. To meet this challenge, a comprehensive programme of interpretation, educational and participatory activities has been designed to inspire people to celebrate, value and conserve the unique natural and cultural heritage of the landscape. 640,400 engagement opportunities will be provided during the lifetime of HLF support.

The Sill will attract more than 100,000 visitors each year to an all-weather and year-round facility that also offers hostel accommodation, retail facilities and a café. It will also deliver substantial economic benefits to the area, including a rural

growth hub to support the development of rural enterprises, and offer a wide range of volunteering activities to strengthen local communities through increased participation opportunities.

It is predicted that the Sill will deliver substantial economic benefits to the region including the creation of over 100 new jobs and around £5m of additional visitor spending, every year. A rural growth hub will support the development of rural enterprises, and offer a wide range of volunteering activities to strengthen local communities through increased participation opportunities.

The Sill will create more ambassadors and support those passionate about our enchanting countryside. Ray Taylor, Sill volunteer said: “This iconic project has so many strands to it that it offers something for everyone and takes volunteering in the National Park to a new level.”

For more information about The Sill project, visit the Sill website, find the Sill on Facebook or follow the Sill on Twitter: @thesillproject

About YHA (England and Wales)
YHA (England and Wales) is a charity with a clear mission: to inspire all, especially young people, to broaden their horizons gaining knowledge and independence through new experiences of adventure and discovery.

YHA has a network of around 160 diverse hostels and camping barns throughout England and Wales – often situated in exceptional locations. These welcoming and sociable spaces are open to everyone. They have strong beliefs and a passion for what they do. By encouraging a spirit of adventure, they aim to inspire people of all ages to discover the world around us.

YHA helps young people take part in educational or recreational visits with their friends or classmates by providing financial support from YHA’s bursary scheme, Breaks for Kids. In 2011, YHA provided 5,553 of these funded trips.

In 2011, YHA recorded 1,719,348 overnight stays and had 218,054 members. Further information about YHA can be found at the YHA website.

Further information

For media enquiries relating to the Sill Project contact: PR Account Manager, Anna Mitchell, at Gardiner Richardson on 0191 261 4250, 07970 729758 or email annam@gardiner-richardson.com / Senior PR Account Executive, Ruth Lawson, at Gardiner Richardson on 0191 261 4250 / ruthl@gardiner-richardson.com.

For any other enquiries relating to Northumberland National Park Authority contact: The Sill Project Director, on 01434 611 527, 07585 114 329 or email stuart.evans@nnpa.org.uk.

YHA (England & Wales): Anna Melton, In the Works PR on 01246 386 480, 07837 108 559 or email anna@intheworkspr.co.uk.