

New life for the Wandle

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The first HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme in the London area will receive almost £2million and brings together the London Borough councils of Wandsworth, Croydon, Sutton and Merton with the National Trust, Wandle Trust, Groundwork London, London Wildlife Trust, Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust and Wandle Valley Festival.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: “The Wandle is a fascinating watercourse whose existence, let alone its history, is only glimpsed at a few points during its journey from Surrey to the Thames. This exciting partnership project will open up both physical access and educational opportunities to the many communities that live or work close to it.”

The River Wandle meanders for 20 miles from the Surrey Hills to the Thames at Wandsworth and through much of its length is either inaccessible or runs through dense urban areas. HLF has already contributed funding to major projects at specific points along its length such as Morden Hall Park, Wandle Park in Croydon and Carshalton Ponds.

The new five-year Landscape Partnership will energise hundreds of local volunteers to get involved with projects that involve physical improvements to riverbanks and access, removing invasive weed species, replacing concrete culverts with natural sloping banks and installing boardwalks. This will help to open up areas of both natural and historic interest and is supported by a learning programme so that communities can find out more about the various aspects of the watercourse; its wildlife interest and its past industrial uses.

Children and young people will be encouraged to find out more about the river and one particular emphasis will be a study of climate change and conservation issues. A training programme will help volunteers to gain a range of skills to perform the various tasks that need doing and to support the Wandle’s conservation into the future.

Along its course the river runs through 12 sites of Nature Conservation Interest but there is also rich cultural, religious and industrial heritage including the sites of the 12th-century Merton Priory, a number of former mills, and associations with William Morris and Liberty Printing Works.

HLF’s Landscape Partnership grant programme helps conserve some of the UK’s most diverse and locally distinctive landscapes by supporting schemes that provide long-term social, economic and environmental benefits. It is the most significant grant scheme available for landscape-scale projects and is at the cutting edge of delivery.

Wandsworth Council is the lead authority in the Living Wandle Landscape Partnership. For the authority Councillor Sara McDermott, a board member of the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, said: “This is great news. The Living Wandle Landscape Partnership project will really raise the profile of this much loved and historic river and shows a real determination to improve the river and highlight its important heritage. Over the next five years all the partners involved in the regeneration of the Wandle will be working on a range of exciting projects to involve local people in celebrating the history of the river and safeguarding its future. We are all committed to bringing this river back to the heart of south London life.”

Merton Council Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, Cllr Nick Draper, said: “This is great news. At last we’ll be able to properly celebrate Merton as one of the most important cultural, religious and political

centres of medieval Britain. Thank you for your hard work, Priory Trust, and thank you Heritage Lottery Fund for awarding us the money.”

Croydon Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services, Cllr Phil Thomas, said: “Croydon Council is excited at the news that this partnership bid has been successful. Our vision for Waddon Ponds is for the grounds to become more of a wetland park as opposed to formal gardens. This will mean that local people have a natural environment to relax in what is a busy urban neighbourhood.”

Nic Durston, Chair of the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, said: “This grant is testament to all the fantastic work being done by partners working to create a regional park in the Wandle Valley. Our vision is of a high quality regional park that enables people to get closer to nature and be more active, and brings jobs, growth and prosperity to the Wandle Valley. This fantastic award from the Heritage Lottery Fund is a significant step towards making that vision a reality.”

Dr Bella Davies, Director of the Wandle Trust, said: “The Wandle has a rich heritage and a special landscape character which we’re delighted will now be shared with many more people through the Living Wandle programme. The Wandle Trust is looking forward to working with many local communities to deliver the Wandle’s new catchment plan – as well as developing a new education programme, working with local people to discover the source of the Wandle and helping them to recognise and report pollution. Together, the project partners and the communities of the Wandle Valley will help to bring the river’s rich heritage to life for everyone to enjoy, whilst having a lot of fun along the way!”

John Hawkes, for the Merton Priory Trust, said: “Thanks to this grant, the historic foundations of Merton Priory’s medieval Chapter House, long hidden in an enclosure under the A24 will now be given a dramatic new glass-fronted entrance and internal facilities, opening the Wandle Valley’s most precious archaeological relic to public view and enhancing its value as an important educational resource.”

Notes to editors

HLF is currently prioritising a number of outer London boroughs to encourage project applications. Among these projects those involving the River Wandle include Morden Hall Park, Merton, where a £990,000 project has enabled the renovation of an historic watermill and stableyard and improved access to parkland and wetlands; Wandle Park, Croydon, where a £1.9million grant has enabled the restoration of traditional Victorian park features and the restoration of the Wandle, which had been culverted underground, as a visible aspect of the greenspace; and Honeywood House, Sutton, where the borough’s flagship historic house and museum has recently re-opened following restoration supported by a £635,000 grant, as a major feature alongside Carshalton Ponds which flow into the Wandle.

The Landscape Partnerships programme is for schemes led by partnerships of local, regional and national interests which aim to conserve areas of distinctive landscape character throughout the UK. It provides grants ranging from £100,000 to £3million. Landscape Partnership schemes are designed to contribute outcomes for heritage, people and communities.

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