

Beauty spot valley gets £1m windfall

LOTTERY GRANT: Projects to promote Constable landscape

By Craig Robinson

A RIVER valley immortalised by some of England's best-loved painters has received a windfall of nearly £1million to help with its conservation and celebrate the iconic landscape.

Managing a Masterpiece is a three-year project based in the Stour Valley on the Essex/Suffolk border, an area made famous by artists such as John Constable, Sir Alfred Munnings and Thomas Gainsborough.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced yesterday that it had awarded a grant of £910,000 to the scheme, based around the five heritage hotspots of Dedham, Stoke by Nayland, Bures, Sudbury and Clare.

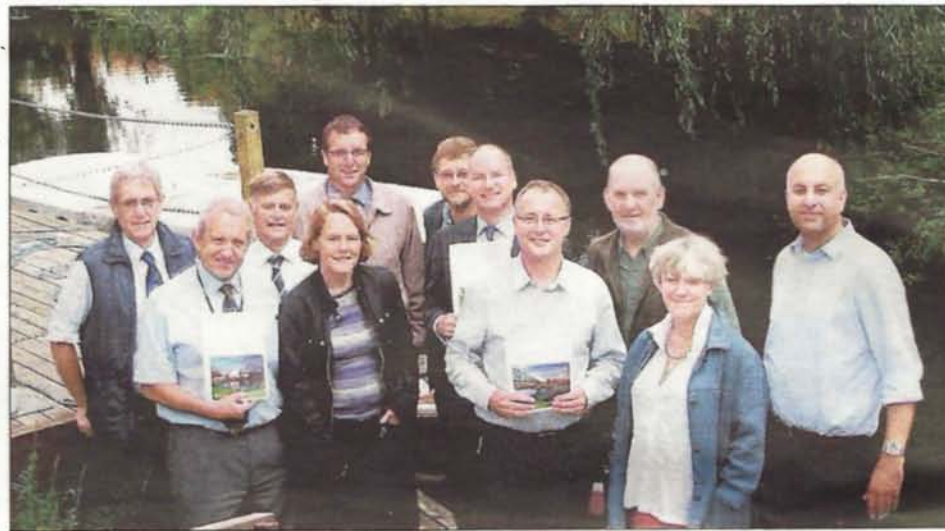
The money will be spent on 62 individual projects covering wildlife, landscape, archaeology, art, recreation, conservation and transport, and the first could be ready by this summer.

The initiative is being led by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project in conjunction with the Historic Environment Branch of Essex County Council and the Archaeological Service of Suffolk County Council.

Among other aims, they are hoping to raise public awareness of the valley landscape and its history through archaeological digs and a survey of riverside structures, local traditions, customs and folklore.

There will also be an emphasis on conservation - with particular prominence given to the

Turn to Page 4



DELIGHT: Officials and members of the Stour Valley Project celebrate the huge injection of cash to help with the conservation of the area

Photograph:
EDWARD MARTIN

Beauty spot's £1m windfall

From Page One

views immortalised by Constable and other painters - and a special project to restore a historic Stour lighter, a barge that used to operate on the river.

Meanwhile, there will be a range of initiatives, including panoramic photographs of views from church towers, workshops and exhibitions for new artists and schools using the countryside as inspiration.

Leaders are also hoping to re-introduce the Dedham Vale hopper bus

from Manningtree station and create new walking and cycling trails to encourage people out of their cars.

Simon Amstutz, joint AONB manager for the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, said: "We are delighted to hear this news after so much hard work by so many people to make sure that there is something for everyone to get involved in."

James Halsall, chairman of the Managing a Masterpiece Partnership Board, added: "This scheme will make a real difference

about how visitors and residents understand and interact with the area."

Jeremy Lucas, cabinet member for heritage, culture and arts at Essex County Council, said: "This will bring real improvements to the quality of life of communities in the Stour Valley."

Judy Terry, Suffolk County Council portfolio holder for creating the greenest county, added: "It will engage the local community in exciting wildlife, landscape and visitor projects."

Editorial comment - Page 22

Stour Valley project is superb news

THE Stour Valley is one of the jewels in East Anglia's crown, with iconic landscapes and beautiful villages of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lining the banks of the river, which is the dividing line between Suffolk and Essex.

And, of course, its deserved international reputation is down to the works of some of our leading artists - John Constable, Sir Alfred Munnings and Thomas Gainsborough.

So it is great news that a conservation project, Mastering a Masterpiece, has been awarded nearly £1million of Heritage Lottery funding based around the villages of Dedham, Stoke by Nayland, Bures, Sudbury and Clare.

The money is to be spent on 62 schemes covering wildlife, landscape, archaeology, art, recreation, conservation and transport - the first of which could be ready by this summer.

There are three main objectives. The first is to raise public awareness of the valley landscape, its history, local traditions, customs and folklore.

The second targets conservation to demonstrate environmental management with a special emphasis on the views immortalised by the great painters, and the third is to celebrate the landscape with a range of initiatives including 360-degree panoramic photographs of views from church towers, and workshops and exhibitions for new artists using the surrounding countryside as inspiration.

It is also hoped that the Dedham Vale hopper bus from the gateway railway station at Manningtree will be introduced which, along with the creation of walking and cycling trails, will encourage people out of their cars to enjoy the fabulous landscape.

This is a win-win project, not only for local residents but also the wider area in the two counties from the influx of green tourists.