

## **Ham Hill gets go ahead thanks to Heritage Fund grant**

The Countryside Team at South Somerset District Council (SSDC) are delighted to announce that they have been awarded £1.6 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund towards their project '*Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future.*'

Ham Hill Country Park has a rich history dating back to the Stone Age, when man first settled on the hill over 5,000 years ago. In 1975 it was established as a country park and has since grown to 173 hectares, with limited visitor facilities despite an estimated 300,000 visitors a year.

The Country Park is popular with local people who enjoy its fantastic views, hidden places and variety of landscape and wildlife. With its amazing heritage value, the site is a Scheduled Monument and Geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Due to various pressures the Scheduled Monument has been designated 'at risk' by Historic England since 2019.

This £2.4 million project will seek to conserve and protect the wealth of archaeology at this Iron Age hillfort, improve biodiversity and habitat management, provide better visitor facilities and engage visitors and local communities with the heritage, geological, cultural and wildlife importance of Ham Hill.

**Councillor Sarah Dyke, Environment Portfolio Holder**, said:

*"We are excited to embark on this project at Ham Hill. It is vital to ensuring the future sustainability of this incredible country park; not just as a Scheduled Monument and biodiversity hotspot, but also as a place where people come to relax, have fun, socialise and learn. Ham Hill is a lot of things to a lot of people, and it is wonderful that the Heritage Fund has recognised it's importance, not just for the residents of South Somerset, but for the heritage of the country."*

A new visitor centre will include a permanent exhibition space, which will tell the stories of Ham Hill through the display of artefacts, use of imagery and hands on activities. A temporary exhibition space will allow local artists to display their work and provide the opportunity for themed exhibitions focusing on Ham Hill's stories. A café will provide refreshments and a space for socialising, whilst public toilets and a 'Changing Place' will increase facilities for visitors, particularly those with additional requirements, making Ham Hill a welcoming place for all.

One of the main objectives of the project is to involve local people with the heritage of Ham Hill. A visitor survey in 2018 revealed that only a third of current visitors know that Ham Hill is an Iron Age Hillfort. The addition of a visitor centre, with a permanent exhibition, will help all visitors to understand the complex story of Ham Hill; from its geological formation, through to the creation of the hillfort by the Durotriges tribe and its later Roman occupation.

Later stories of quarrying and workers' rights marches, as led by George Mitchell, show the strong link between the local villages and the Hill and how the landscape has been shaped over thousands of years, explaining why it supports such a diverse range of wildlife today.

These themes will form the basis for wider site information and the creation of trails to encourage visitors to explore Ham Hill beyond the war memorial, which is currently the most popular area of the country park.

**Stuart McLeod, Director England - London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund**, said:

*“We are delighted to support South Somerset District Council to uncover Ham Hill’s history. Not only will this project focus on the historic stories of the site, it will also create vital facilities for the community, enabling more people to learn about the heritage that is on their doorstep. Thanks to National Lottery players, we can invest in projects such as these that make communities better places to live and makes heritage more accessible to all.”*

The current team of rangers at Ham Hill do a fantastic job, but with increased visitors more support to protect and manage the upkeep of the park will be required. The Heritage Fund grant will enable a doubling of the small ranger team to include an additional Assistant Ranger for habitat management and scheduled monument protection works and an Engagement Ranger. The Engagement Ranger will be fundamental to delivering the exciting four-year activity plan, which includes new public events, community group workshops & school visits.

**Paul McNeill Ham Hill Ranger** said:

*“I am delighted that this special site is getting the investment it deserves. From repairing paths to protect the Scheduled Monument, to managing woodlands to secure the future of our dormice population, there is a huge breadth of works that can now be undertaken. There will also be many new opportunities that we can offer to potential volunteers; regular wildlife surveying will help the ranger team better understand the success of particular management approaches and feed into Somerset wide data sets that are informing nature recovery efforts; visitor centre volunteers will meet and greet and help visitors understand the special stories of Ham Hill; roaming volunteers can engage with visitors to help people explore and to explain the reasons behind any restrictions e.g. ground nesting skylarks. This greater range of opportunities should enable more people to get involved and to support this work the existing ranger’s office building will become the Volunteer Hub.”*

*If you are interested in finding out more or visiting the country park, visit*

[www.visitsouthsomerset.com/ham-hill](http://www.visitsouthsomerset.com/ham-hill)