

**PRESS RELEASE with PICTURES:** For immediate release

**Date:** 5th September 2017

**Public support crucial to long-term success of extensive restoration project at ancient Woodbury Castle hill fort**

Restoration work is about to begin at a 2,500-year-old Iron Age hill fort in East Devon.

Woodbury Castle is characterised by its deep earthwork ramparts enclosing a level interior of approximately two hectares studded with deciduous trees, and occupies the highest point of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths on Woodbury Common.

It is a nationally important archaeological site and prominent landmark owned by Clinton Devon Estates and managed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust.

The hill fort, which dates back to 500 – 300BC, became a Scheduled Monument in 1923; Scheduled Monuments are prehistoric monuments recognised as deserving of state protection.

The site was put on Historic England’s at Risk Register several years ago when it became apparent that the area was suffering, predominantly from erosion due to a high volume of visitors but also due to damage from tree roots and scrub growth.

Last year the Trust secured funding from Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship scheme to undertake extensive restoration work that will directly contribute to conserving and protecting the site, resulting in its eventual removal from the at Risk Register.

The collaborative project, which got underway this month, is benefitting from additional funds granted by Historic England, and Devon County Council’s Historic Environment Team and the Devon Archaeological Society have also been involved with the design work.

The funding will enable better interpretation at the monument, creating a sense of welcome for visitors so they become aware of its archaeological significance upon arrival, while promoting an understanding and appreciation of its national and historical importance.

Public support is deemed crucial to the long-term success of the project and future conservation of the hill fort and the hope is that visitors will feel a sense of stewardship for the site.

Volunteers are being sought to assist with some of the work, and the Trust plans to establish a volunteer archaeological monitoring scheme to give local people with an interest in archaeology or natural history the opportunity to be involved in ongoing preservation work. The Trust is also planning on hosting guided walks for people to learn more about the site.

Kim Strawbridge Site Manager for the Pebblebed Heaths, said: “Woodbury Castle is a fantastic site that is special to a lot of people for a whole range of reasons.

“We need to take people along with us on this project so that people value its archaeological significance as well as the personal value they have for the place.

“This is an exciting opportunity to celebrate the heritage of this landmark within the heaths.”

There will be several stages to the work: access to the site will be improved with new steps and deep erosion scars caused by visitor use on banks and ditches will be repaired under archaeological supervision.

The repaired banks will be seeded and selective tree and scrub removal will let in more light allowing ground vegetation to establish which is vital for safeguarding the earthworks into the future.

The careful removal and crown reduction of a selected trees and scrub on the site of the castle itself and in the immediate vicinity will open-up a view which has been blocked for many years, allowing people to appreciate the hill fort’s original function as well as enhancing the monument’s setting and its imposing ramparts.

The work will also help to protect buried archaeology, including the remains of an Iron Age round house, which are at risk of damage from tree roots. Careful ongoing monitoring and management of the remaining large beech trees will help ensure the health of these specimen trees.

New information panels telling the story of the site with illustrations of the original hill fort and its inhabitants by Exeter based artist Jane Read will be installed, in addition to a sign at the entrance to the monument and improvements made to the car park.

Temporary barriers will be in situ for two to three years while the repairs consolidate and the vegetation re-establishes, during which time signs will ask people to avoid walking on the areas undergoing restoration.

“We want people to be involved in the project and are keen for people to join us for our guided walks to learn more about this special monument and why the works are so important to securing its future,” continued Kim.

“We’re asking that people help us care for the hill fort in a number of ways; by accessing the site using the proper routes and keeping off the slopes and ditches, and not riding bikes or horses on the monument.

“We would like people to be part of the monument’s story and help us protect it into the future.”

Mike Pearce, Natural England Lead Advisor to the area, added: “This is an extremely important project and we are pleased to be able to facilitate it through our Countryside Stewardship scheme.”

Charlotte Russell Historic England Heritage at Risk Project officer, added: “This is a fantastic opportunity to repair and conserve the Woodbury Castle Iron Age hill fort and secure its survival for future generations.

“I am thrilled to see this project come to fruition; it’s the culmination of a lot of work by a number of committed specialists all seeking to look after and improve this very fragile and nationally important site.”

**Ends**

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**Photos by Jake Newman/KOR Communications:**

**Picture caption:** Kim Strawbridge Site Manager for the Pebblebed Heaths, Mike Pearce, Natural England Lead Advisor and Martin Banks owner of Banks Construction who will be conducting the work

**Artist impressions by Devon illustrator Jane Read**

**Notes to Editors:**

**About Clinton Devon Estates**

Clinton Devon Estatesis involved in farming, sustainable forestry and timber products**,** deer management and residential property. It has a portfolio of commercial property across the South West and provides one of the region’s best equipped equestrian event venues at Bicton. It also owns commons at Woodburywhich form the major part of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Clinton Devon Estateshas been awarded the prestigious Queen’s Award for Enterprise in the category of Sustainable Development in 2005, 2010, and 2015, reflecting its commitment to conservation management through Countryside Stewardship Schemes and privately funded Estate led environmental initiatives.

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths are managed by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, a charity set up by Clinton Devon Estates to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Pebblebed Heaths and the Otter Estuary for the benefit of future generations.

The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths are located in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and have both UK and European designations, including a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

For more information please visit [**www.clintondevon.com**](http://www.clintondevon.com)