

PRESS RELEASE

Strictly embargoed until 00.01 on 20th October 2011



Durham's transformed 'Black Beaches' are recognised in prestigious international landscape award

The restoration of the Durham Heritage Coast – previously an industrial wasteland – has been placed runner-up in the second Council of Europe Landscape Awards. Recognised as “an excellent model for the regeneration of degraded coastal areas” Durham’s Coast was one of only three entrants to be awarded a ‘Special Mention’ for its transformation.

The Council of Europe Landscape Award, presented just once every two years, is designed to raise awareness of the value of landscapes, their role in society and positive changes within them. A total of 14 countries competed for this year’s award including Italy, France, Hungary and Norway. The overall winner was the Carbonia Project in Italy.

From Sunderland to Hartlepool, the Durham Heritage Coast was once scarred by industrial activity. For a century, colliery waste was tipped onto the beaches and into the sea in enormous quantities creating the infamous ‘black beaches’ that provided a bleak backdrop for the films *Get Carter* and *Alien 3*. Work by the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership, which began with the Turning The Tide project and the removal of 1.3 million tonnes of colliery spoil a decade ago, was recognised for the transformation of the landscape into one of great natural, historical and geological interest as well as one supporting a growing tourism industry.

Niall Benson, Durham Heritage Coast Officer, said: “We are thrilled that this fascinating stretch of coastline has been recognised internationally for its value and beauty. It’s a strong endorsement of all the hard work undertaken by the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership and the local communities along the coastal strip and it’s an achievement for which everyone involved should feel justly proud.”

The Durham Heritage Coast won the right to represent the UK in the European Landscape Award following its win of the title UK Landscape of the Year in November 2010. Managed by the Landscape Institute, the UK Landscape Award was created by the European Landscape Convention to promote the value of landscapes and their benefits to local communities.

Jo Watkins, President of the Landscape Institute said: “It is right that we recognise the importance of landscapes and their value to society. Just look at what has been achieved in Durham – an extraordinary transformation that is contributing on so many different levels. It just shows what can be achieved when the full potential of a landscape is realised.”

The Landscape Award of the Council of Europe will be presented in Évora, Portugal on the 20th October. A video of the transformation of the Durham Heritage Coast can be viewed online by visiting http://www.uklandscapeaward.org/video/durham_heritage_coast.php

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For further information, interviews and images please contact Sarah Harrison, on behalf of the Landscape Institute, on 07768 372892 or email sarah@sarahharrisonpr.com

Notes to Editors:

THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION & LANDSCAPE AWARD:

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) established a Council of Europe Landscape Award to recognise quality stewardship of landscapes. Council of Europe member states run national competitions to identify national winners who are then put forward for the European-level award.

The ELC is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape, and is dedicated exclusively to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all dimensions of European landscape. The ELC became binding from 1st March 2007. The convention highlights the need to recognise landscape in law, to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes, and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. It also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies.

The ELC is championed by DEFRA, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government, the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland and their agencies.

The Award is managed in the UK by the Landscape Institute.

THE DURHAM HERITAGE COAST PARTNERSHIP:

In 2003, the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership succeeded the hugely successful five-year Turning The Tide project. It comprises Durham County Council, Natural England, Seaham Town Council, National Trust, Durham Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Northumbria Water, Hartlepool Borough Council, City of Sunderland Council, Horden Regeneration Partnership, Ryhope Community Association, Easington Colliery Regeneration Partnership, Blackhall Regeneration Partnership and Groundwork.

The main aims of the on-going work of the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership are to:

- conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coast
- facilitate its enjoyment, understanding and appreciation by visitors and local people
- maintain and improve the environmental health of inshore waters and its beaches
- take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing and the economic and social needs of the small communities on the coast
- promote community participation in the stewardship of the coast

- integrate fully with adjoining areas and actively promote Integrated Coastal Zone Management

THE LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE:

The Landscape Institute is the royal chartered body for landscape architects. It is a professional organisation and educational charity working to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the public benefit. It accredits university courses and promotes professional development to ensure that landscape architects deliver the highest standards of practice. It works with government to improve the planning, design and management of urban and rural landscape. Through its advocacy programmes and support to its members it champions landscape, and the landscape profession, in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. Visit www.Landscapeinstitute.org for more information or follow the Institute on twitter: @talklandscape