Application for Funding

Re. S106 Agreement - Planning Application: 16/01231/FUL

Introduction

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council hereby lodge an application to secure S106 funding in support of their project to provide a sustainable, safe, pleasant environment, in the small historic village of Low Coniscliffe, located to the west of the market town of Darlington.

The sustainable project will provide access for all, to the Teesdale Way and banks of the River Tees whilst encouraging biodiversity.

The project is to undertake:

Essential works to improve the Teesdale Way footpaths and undertake health and safety work to the woodland

Removal of invasive species plants such as Snowberry, Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam

The creation of a high level of biodiversity by planting more and diverse species of trees, hedging and shrubs and by installing different types of birdboxes.

The creation of areas of interest: history and wildlife boards, a sculpture, forestry trail, seating etc.

The Improvement of access for all, by providing enlarged improved parking areas and disabled access path to the riverbank

The provision of an attractive open space area adjacent to the new housing development at the junction of the A67 and entrance to Gate Lane.

History

The earliest evidence of occupation in Low Coniscliffe is a burial mound recently found on the field to the East of Gate Lane at the entrance to the village of Low Coniscliffe. The mound dates from between 1500 BC and 2400 BC and shows that pastoral people of the time had developed an attachment to the Low Coniscliffe area.

Various historical records contain references to Low Coniscliffe evidencing a pele tower, a Manor House, a dovecot, a medieval tythe barn, gallows and a toll gate located at the entrance road into the village hence the name Gate Lane.

In the 1800's the village was primarily a farming community and large areas were covered with orchards.

The Baydale Beck Inn is an important landmark within the Parish and has a rich history. There has been an inn on the site for over 250 years, the original being called the Badle Beck Inn, built of river cobblestones from the Tees.

Wildlife

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish boasts a wide range of species and habitats. There are areas of woodland priority habitat predominantly along the River Tees and areas of deciduous woodland, as well as other areas of woodland, including the designated Merrybent Community Forest.

The Parish is an important wildlife habitat, with frequent sightings of various species of mammals including: otter, water vole, deer, hedgehog, fox, badger, stoat/mink, hare and a number of species of bats. Also, there are regular sightings of different species of birds including: kingfisher, heron, red kite, jay, sparrow hawk, buzzard, sky lark, sand marten, swift, swallow, house martin, mallard, goosander, dipper, wagtail, cormorant, meadow pipit, treecreeper, greenfinch, rook, jackdaw, cuckoo and others.

The River Tees embankment is an important biodiversity network with an unspoiled riparian woodland landscape which provides a strategic green corridor rich in a variety of wildlife.

Sustainable Project

Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council wish to achieve the completion of a successful sustainable project, which mainly focuses on the riverbank area of the Teesdale Way, where it passes through the Parish of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent.

Numerous meetings primarily on site have been held with Durham Wildlife, The Tees Rivers Trust and Groundwork who have all endorsed our project.

In addition, we have been in consultation with the Darlington Brown Trout Angling Association and Ian Morgan, the farmer, who own the riverbank, to discuss our plans for conservation and sustainable enhancement of the area. Both of whom have provided their support and consent to the work being undertaken on their land.

We are now working with Groundwork who intend to apply to the National Heritage Lottery Fund to obtain additional funding.

The Parish Council wish to improve the area which has both historical and biodiversity interests to make it more easily/readily accessible to all by:

Parking

Providing an enlarged, improved car park with designated parking spaces at the end of Wood Lane.

Fencing off the carpark and providing a gated access to the riverbank and the Teesdale Way from both directions.

Improving the parking along the verge of Wood Lane to facilitate unrestricted access to the Teesdale Way.

Improving the parking on Back Lane to provide easy access to the Low Coniscliffe Circular Route.

Footpaths

Improving the surface and access pathway to the riverbank on and from Well Bank.

Installing a small bridge over the stream near Well Bank.

Improving the riverbank footpath by levelling the pathway and installing drainage in locations which are prone to puddling.

Creating a footpath to the riverbank from the car park at the end of Wood Lane which will provide disability access.

Installimg gates/kissing gates to access the Teesdale Way and riverbank from the carpark.

Installing two Teesdale Way signs where it crosses the carpark on Wood Lane.

Seating

Installing benches along the riverbank, located at strategic positions to capture the best views of the river and surrounding woodland, created from sustainable hardwearing materials, so everyone can enjoy this delightful area.

Installing circular seating, to reflect the circular ditches of the bronze age site, in the open space area at the junction of Gate Lane and the A67.

Culture

Commissioning and Installing a sculpture reflecting the heritage of the area.

Placing history boards in the following strategic locations for everyone to read about the various historic locations in the parish.

- To be installed in the open space area at the junction of the A67 and Gate Lane. (Bronze Age Burial Mound and the Toll Gate.)
- To be placed In Merrybent next to the seat in the open space area west of the A1 motorway bridge. (Merrybent Nurseries and the railway line).
- To be installed near the entrance to the Circular Route on Back Lane. (The site of the Manor House, Dovecote and Pele Tower).

Installing a replica of the Low Coniscliffe pump on Gate Lane, at the entrance to the section of the Teesdale Way which crosses the new development.

Installing name signs in Low Coniscliffe i.e. Gate Lane, Back Lane, Wood Lane and Well Bank to tie in with the descriptions shown on the history boards and to maintain the historic character of the village.

Family

Installing a curved seat near the proposed location of the open space area at the junction of Gate Lane and the A67, to reflect the bronze age burial site.

Installing wildlife boards, identifying species of wildlife which can be spotted in the area, in the following locations:

- Coniscliffe Moor next to the Woodland.
- Well Bank entrance to the riverbank.
- Open space area at the junction of Gate Lane and the A67.
- Car park at bottom of Wood Lane.
- Next to the ford opposite Cleasby.

Replacing the Merrybent Woodland sign with a similar design to the original which disappeared.

Providing more litter bins at end of Wood Lane.

Providing more dog bins along riverbank path.

Creating a forestry trail adjacent to the river, where it bends northwards and the riverbank widens. This will provide a creative interpretation area linked to the parish natural heritage.

Woodland

By cutting back and treating, with herbicide, vast areas of Snowberry, an invasive species plant, along the riverbank and on the verge of Wood Lane and regularly repeating the process until all evidence of the plant is destroyed.

Replacing the cleared areas with UK native shrubs.

Trimming and removing any dangerous trees/branches encroaching on the Teesdale Way.

Cutting back shrubs which are encroaching on the Teesdale Way.

Creating a small orchard of apple trees in the clearing close to the riverbank entrance from Well Bank.

Planting more UK native trees and arranging a big tree planting event. This is to maintain the continuity of the woodland with a variety of trees, as presently there is a predominance of Sycamore trees all of a similar age.

Planting hedging along the farmer's fields to maintain a continuous footpath along the riverbank and to avoid people straying onto private land.

Planting a variety of UK native trees on the opposite side of the footpath to the forest on the Teesdale Way.

Installing different designs of bird boxes high up in the trees to encourage a variety of species to nest.

Summary

The Parish Council considers the above to be an excellent and appropriate use of this S106 funding which is intended to mitigate the development of new properties in Low Coniscliffe.

These proposals have been collated following ten meetings of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Planning Committee and are endorsed by individuals, other groups and organisations. This project will ensure the S106 funding is directly invested in Low Coniscliffe area and is targeted to improve the natural environment, increase biodiversity and contribute to the sustainability of the area whilst improving the understanding of residents, the wider community and other visitors who use the woodland and the River Tees for pleasure and recreation.

All of the above plans will improve the parish and make it an attractive area for everyone to access and enjoy.