

The Mill Brook Nature Park

Prior to tomorrow morning's Zoom meeting, I have been having some thoughts about this project (The Spinney Nature Reserve).

Firstly, the work done by John Seiler and team is exemplary and I fully approve and I would hope that all attendees tomorrow are of a similar disposition.

BUT

A leading question will be the cost of this exercise. I do have a potential solution which I would like to share with you - but firstly some background.

I would draw your attention to *The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF)*, administered by the Heritage Fund, and announced in June. It provides funding for a project such as this (between £50-250k) and will finance 100% of project costs.

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/green-recovery-challenge-fund>

Of the three funding strands in the programme, one relates to 'Connecting people with nature' and I have copied the criteria required below:

1. Connecting people with nature

For example, projects may include actions contributing to:

- ***Improvements to visitor/education facilities***
- ***Creation and improvement of nature-rich, active travel corridors, trails, boardwalks, signage, interpretation, increases in accessible paths in urban and rural locations***
- ***Employment of wardens, rangers, educators etc.***
- ***Bolstering health and wellbeing including blue/green social prescribing and 'green gym' activities***
- ***Improving access to nature for under-represented groups, such as BAME communities, economically disadvantaged communities, children and young people, and older people***
- *Local food growing initiatives*
- ***Volunteering, including the establishment of new local groups or greater public involvement within their organisation***
- ***Community engagement and citizen science for environmental conservation and improvement***

Another strand relates to:

2. Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation

For example, projects may include action contributing to:

- ***Tree planting and woodland creation***
- *Peatland, and other wetland, restoration*
- ***Woodland restoration and management***
- *Wildfire prevention*
- *Hedgerow planting or improvements*
- ***Natural flood management***
- ***Creating, enhancing or connecting blue and green infrastructure***
- *Nature-based solutions to address water quality issues*
- ***River or waterways bank protection and improvements***
- *Blue carbon habitat restoration projects, such as seagrass beds*

Finally, the last strand is:

3. Nature conservation and restoration

For example, projects may include action towards:

- *Creation or restoration of priority habitat (as defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act)*
- *Improvement in the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)*
- ***Creation of blue and green spaces that connect wildlife-rich habitats by acting as wildlife corridors or 'stepping stones'***
- ***Recovery of threatened, iconic or economically important species***
- *Reintroduction of native species or tackling invasive non-native species*
- ***Restoring waterways / fish passage improvements***
- *Preventing, removing or cleaning up pollution, such as marine litter*
- ***Environmental improvements in land management, e.g. for grazing***
- ***Environmental surveying and monitoring work***

In my opinion, and having and currently being involved in a number of Heritage Fund projects, what we are proposing is extremely relevant. However there are a number of problems.

1. We have to submit an expression of interest by 2nd October. Whilst this is easily achievable it depends on whether the Parish Council will support this initiative. If the EoI is approved we will have only a few months to complete the full application.

2. The GRCF require an 'environmental charity' to be involved in the project – thus the Parish Council cannot apply without such a partn

Now, you may be aware that I am Chair of the Sandstone Ridge Trust, we are an environmental charity, our office is in Tattenhall and we have (with other partners - TWiG, Environment Agency, Bolesworth Estate) been working on the Mill Brook for a number of years.

However, the Sandstone Ridge Trust is currently going through a bidding process with the Heritage Fund for another project and I was concerned that partnering another project might prejudice our current application (which is currently on-hold due to C19). Anyway I contacted my case officer at the Heritage Fund this morning and was told that they had no issue with the Sandstone Ridge Trust being involved in another application.

So, that is one problem resolved BUT at this time I have not presented these ideas to my Board of Trustees and this I must do before progressing. I will do this tonight and might have a reply by the meeting tomorrow. I will be arguing that:

- The SRT enters into partnership with TDPC to submit a bid to the GRCF
- TDPC is the lead partner and SRT are acting in an advisory role (to be decided)
- Other partners would include TWiG, Environment Agency and Bolesworth Estate
- The project is called 'Developing the Mill Brook Nature Park' and extends to include land managed by TWiG for the Bolesworth Estate (eg. Jubilee Wood, Flacca wetland etc) and TDPC (Glebe Meadow and Barn Field)

Of course, TDPC would also have to agree to these conditions. Whilst we could wait for a couple of months and then submit when the Heritage Fund gets up and running again in 2021 – this current funding stream could not be more appropriate.