

Background

The parish council has been offered the opportunity to purchase land that runs from Bay Bridge, on Brundall Road, to the footpath from Blofield church to Braydeston, and which adjoins Cremer's Meadow in Brundall. It amounts to 1.65 hectares of pasture land which has been un-grazed for some time.

The land is not being advertised or offered elsewhere for sale by the owner and it is offered to the parish council on the basis that it is used for community and conservation purposes. The land is offered for £80,000 which Broadland District Council confirms as being fair and reasonable for use as a conservation/community site.

The parish council has taken advice from Broadland District Council and its Green Infrastructure Officer has been very helpful. As a result BDC is prepared to contribute both to the cost of purchase and to set-up costs, using its own Green Infrastructure funds which have been levied through S.106 agreements with developers.

BDC is willing to :

- contribute £30,000 towards a purchase,
- meet the legal costs, and
- contribute £15,000 towards the set-up and medium-term development costs.

The cost to the parish council would be:

- £50,000 towards purchase,
- £15,000 allocated to the set-up and medium term development costs – matching BDC's contribution, and
- the long-term annual upkeep costs.

BDC's Green Infrastructure Officer has offered ongoing help and support with:

- developing a long-term management strategy for the site,
- building effective partnerships with local conservation groups, and
- enabling public access and enjoyment of the land in the short-term.

The attached report prepared by the Green Infrastructure Officer has location plans and identifies reasons why the parish council should acquire the land. These include:

- primarily, supporting Blofield parish Neighbourhood Plan objectives, policies and projects; and
- secondly, conserving land which is both important for biodiversity and is a site of local historical landscape significance, and
- thirdly, linking to the existing community/conservation site at Cremer's Meadow (and if a proposed housing development takes place in Brundall, to the similar site proposed for the banks of the Witton Run to the west of the Brundall Road). In any event creating a significant green space between Blofield and Brundall.

If the parish council wishes to proceed BDC is willing to purchase the land and then transfer it to the parish.

Why purchase the land?

The proposed purchase of the land for community and conservation use clearly meets a number of Neighbourhood Plan Policies, including TRA3 and ENV6.

In addition the Plan's Environment objectives – what we want to achieve – include protecting and enhancing the countryside, including wildlife habitats and open spaces, and

Blofield Parish Council meeting 17 November 2018: Purchase of community land.

projects that were identified include investigating the potential to create new community green areas similar to Burlingham and Buckenham Woods.

It is clear that acquiring the land would support the Neighbourhood Plan.

The cost to the parish will be significantly less than the market price thanks to BDC's offer of support. This offer is available now; if the parish delays there can be no guarantee of the funds remaining available, as BDC will have alternative projects to fund and no obligation to spend any in Blofield.

Please see the report prepared by BDC's Green Infrastructure Officer.

How to fund the cost to the parish?

The parish can meet the costs from a mix of CIL, S.106 funds and precept income.

A practical approach might be:

- £50,000 purchase cost met from CIL.
- £15,000 infrastructure fund – a commitment to spend this as far as possible from our S.106 funds. BDC authorises this on a case by case basis. A sum could be included in the precept for 2019/20 and/or 2020/21 if the available S.106 is less than the £15k.
- Precept income for the future routine annual upkeep. This has been estimated at about £1000 by the GI Officer and this could be budgeted for from, say, 2020/21.

At the time of writing the council:

- holds £283,922.08 in CIL with further amounts arising, including about £350k on the Hopkins Homes site;
- has access to £58,758.10 in S.106 funds, some of which is tied to specific sites and purposes and some is more generally available and could be used for this project.

Proposal.

The resolution is that the council:

- 1. seeks to purchase the land on the basis outlined and authorises the RFO to proceed;**
- 2. seeks advice from BDC and commissions a Management Plan;**
- 3. seeks advice from BDC on finding an environmental/conservation group to become a partner responsible for the day-to-day management of the site and works to draft a management contract with such a group for approval by the council;**
- 4. seeks to make the site accessible to the public as soon as practical; and**
- 5. seeks a collaborative and cooperative partnership with The Friends of Cremer's Meadow/Brundall Parish Council.**

I suggest that in view of BDC's offer of financial support this is an opportunity the council should seize now.

Rob Christie.
Chairman Blofield PC