

Viaduct area improvements

# **Proposals for Environmental Enhancement of the Viaduct and Sustrans path**

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For

## **Stamford Bridge In Bloom**

### **Background**

The Stamford Bridge In Bloom Group was set up in 2007, to improve the village environment through the involvement in the RHS Britain In Bloom campaign. Far from dealing purely with horticultural endeavours Britain In Bloom Competition encourages excellence in a range of community aspects, such as pride of place, community involvement and conservation. In 2008 the Village was entered in the Yorkshire in Bloom competition and along with a Silver Award received a special commendation as most promising new entry.

A Sustrans cycleway passes across the old railway viaduct over the river Derwent from the former Station area and continues towards York via Dunnington and is well used by the village. Throughout 2008 and 2009 a successful Breathing Places funding bid enabled the group to create and build a new link path from the viaduct to the river on the north side completing a new circular village walk taking in the road bridge and viaduct and riverbanks between. The funding covered the eight thousand pound construction costs of the path as well as a new bench, picnic table and a number of bird and bat boxes.

Following this success and the official opening of the new path on a specially organised family fun day celebration in June 2009, the Committee turned their attention to enhancing the conservation value of the viaduct and surrounding areas. As one of the few public green spaces and a popular traffic-free walking and cycling route in the village this project has potential to bring great benefits to many residents as well as improving the attractiveness of Stamford Bridge to visitors. This report sets out some proposals for improving the conservation and amenity value of the viaduct and station area, including the parish paths and is intended to form a basis for consultation with Stamford Bridge residents, The Parish Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

## **Summary of Objectives**

The following objectives, considered in these proposals were formed following informal discussions with members of the SBIB committee.

1. Enhance the aesthetic appeal of the sustrans path and Old Station area.
2. Maintain access along cycleways and parish paths.
3. Enhance biodiversity, including food, cover and nesting habitats for birds and small mammals, wildflowers, invertebrates etc.
4. Create a wildlife corridor across the viaduct, linking both sides of the river eg for small mammals, invertebrates.
5. Encourage native wildflowers, shrubs and trees by natural regeneration or planting where appropriate.
6. Control or limit spread of non-native or invasive species
7. Discourage access on unauthorised routes.

## **Some known issues**

- The ballast strip across the viaduct and alongside the Sustrans path from the old railway line results in very thin stony soils and consequently is very challenging to establish any new plantings in.
- High level of foot traffic along footpath and large grass areas at Station end used for ball games etc.
- Regular dog-walking route. A regular complaint to Parish Council is of some irresponsible dog owners who do not dispose of dog mess properly, eg bagged in plastic bag but left adjacent to path.
- ERYC manage grass areas by cutting. Any changes to cutting regimes will be subject to agreement.
- Any management of the area is subject to close scrutiny by local residents, sometimes with conflicting opinions.

## **Objectives in more detail with General Recommendations**

### **1. Enhance the aesthetic appeal of the sustrans path and old station area.**

- Existing horticultural planting in Station Club area to be retained and enhanced.
- Consider new planting beds of low maintenance perennial shrubs or plants in vicinity of Station Club, Play area and sports hall.

### **2. Maintain access along cycleways and parish paths.**

- Grass cutting, verge cutting and weed control, to maintain an open feel to paths and maintain wheelchair access on designated routes such as new link route Parish Path no.10.
- High traffic areas eg Sustrans path require a wider buffer to allow cyclists, pedestrians, dogs etc to pass comfortably.
- Control scrub as and when it begins encroaching on the central viaduct stretch to retain open views from the bridge.
- Improvements to footpath surfacing, drainage, levels where achievable. In particular the link path from the Old Station area down to the south bank of the river needs some attention ie revetment, drainage by spring seeps, possibly re-routing narrow gap between mature poplars.

### **3. Enhance biodiversity, including food, cover and nesting habitats for birds and small mammals, wildflowers, invertebrates etc.**

- Put up remaining bird and bat boxes in suitable locations. Consider habitat piles and hibernacula for amphibians.
- Encourage natural regeneration of wildflower verges and maintain or restore hedgerows to provide good nesting cover, and winter berries for birds.
- Consider where hedges will benefit from laying or coppicing to rejuvenate them and develop dense growth at base. Gap up hedgerows where appropriate and soil depth allows.

#### **4. Create a wildlife corridor across the viaduct, linking both sides of the river eg for small mammals, invertebrates.**

- A tussocky, herb rich meadow habitat along the viaduct section will form a wildlife bridge between the two sides of the river particularly for invertebrates such as ground beetles and for small mammals such as field voles, bank voles, and shrews.

#### **5. Encourage native wildflowers, shrubs and trees.**

- The tree-lined parts of the Sustrans path and Old Station area fall within the Stamford Bridge Conservation Area. As such ERYC has an obligation to ensure that 'the area's long term character and appearance is not damaged' All works to trees in the Conservation Area more than 7.5cm diameter at 1.5m above ground, or 10cm if thinning, need to be notified, in writing, to ERYC at least six weeks before carrying out work.
- Retain existing cover of trees and woodland for the landscape value to the area. Give consideration where possible, to retaining vistas from the viaduct, especially up and down the river and towards the old bridge. Also consider views from bench seats.
- Manage wooded areas by selective thinning in line with good arboricultural practice. Where it does not pose a threat to the public, or constitute an eyesore standing dead wood and fallen dead wood should be retained for its wildlife value, thus the wooded areas adjacent to the Station car park and play area may deserve more tidy management from a safety viewpoint but further away a more natural woodland feel can be encouraged.

#### **6. Control or limit spread of non-native or invasive species**

- In particular the invasive weed Himalayan Balsam should be eradicated from the river banks eg where it has established on the northern side, close to the kissing gate by the new picnic area.
- Other considerations are injurious weeds eg thistles, docks as well as nettles and brambles where they cause a nuisance to path users. Brambles and nettles are both useful wildlife habitats in their own right and should be retained where they do not conflict with other objectives eg 2. and 5.

#### **7. Discourage access on unauthorised routes.**

- A number of places suffer erosion and trampling from unofficial short cuts and play by children, particularly on slopes. These areas should be kept to a minimum, whilst recognizing that blocking

access completely may only result in further damage as alternative routes are found and that there are limited natural play areas for children in the village. Where such erosion is unsightly, simple, unobtrusive measures may be the best approach, such as natural barriers and hiding lines of sight. Such measures have been employed already in the form of small log piles on wooded slopes and planting of gorse to grow up into thickets.

### **Specific suggestions for consideration**

- Consider managing grassier ends of viaduct section as hay meadow with annual late summer cut and removal of cuttings to encourage natural increase in native local wildflowers. Survey existing flora against which to monitor changes.
  - Grasses and wildflowers will provide food for species of butterflies, moths, hoverflies etc.
  - Long grasses will provide a habitat and safe corridor for ground beetles, spiders, voles, mice and shrews.
  - Annual cutting and raking (opportunity for community volunteer work parties) will help prevent rank grass species dominating the sward and encourage wildflowers which thrive in poor shallow soils.
- Dry stony mid section of viaduct may be suitable for wild thyme or other early successional herbs, but difficult to establish.
- Along far end of path beyond Viaduct and other suitable locations where soil depth allows, consider planting native berry-bearing shrubs.
- Manage 'hedgerows' at far end to encourage diversity of native woody species. Plant new whips to fill gaps if soil allows (eg blackthorn, field maple, wych elm, hazel, crab apple)
- Consider thinning elder on east facing bank of new No 10. link path, to allow in light to ground flora. A clump of orchids was uncovered in the past year. Conditions could be improved to encourage these and related grassland flowers of poor soils on the lower slopes.
  - Control of nettles/ annual weeds may be necessary until seed bank of perennial hedgerow flora returns eg primrose, arum, celandine etc.
  - Use woody material as habitat piles for woodland invertebrates in suitable locations.
- Consider location for a bird feeding station. ( Ease of access for filling up; close to shrub and tree cover, easily viewed yet not too much disturbance)

- Closer to heavily used recreational areas where greater foot traffic planting can be more functional ( eg provide screening, discourage unwanted access routes)
- Consider space for potential young people's recreation area to complement play park and cater for older children ( ideas: shelter with multi-purpose seating, fitness equipment for older children, skate park or site suitable for mobile 'street sport' activities in holidays)
- Consider planting up native fruiting shrubs to encourage foraging for local wild foods.. A Community 'Wild Larder'...
  - Wild apples or crab apples grown by school, from locally collected seed?
  - Sloes, damsons, bullaces, hazel or cob nuts, rowan – supplied as native hedging plants
  - Compliment existing brambles, rosehips, elderberry which can be found along the viaduct.