Ambitious coastal project given the go-ahead

AN innovative and ambitious project for a coastal challenge route in Copeland has been given the green light.

The recreational route, which will stretch from Whitehaven to Millom, will feature adrenalin activities, cycling facilities and art installations at various intervals along its unbroken 40-mile trail, and will be available all year round.

Work will begin immediately and will be complete in time to host the first of what will become an annual mass participation event in September next year.

Led by Copeland Council, the Connecting Cumbria’s Hidden Coast project will receive just over £1 million funding from the Government’s Coastal Communities Fund as announced by Jake Berry MP this week. Sellafield Ltd will also provide £605,000, with further partner support coming from Cumbria County Council, Natural England, Muncaster Castle and the Western Lake District and Coast Partnership.

Largely following the route of the designated English Coastal Path, the connected challenge route project will see a cyclists’ crossing created over the River Irt to fill a current gap in the path to remove a 6km detour.

In phase one, the route will also include:

- A permanent hub at Silecroft beach that will house a café and toilet/shower facilities
- An augmented climbing wall at Muncaster Castle
- Links to Wheels For All Hub, an inclusive cycling centre
- 1.4km of new cycle path
- 1.8km of new or improved footpaths
- 10 art installations
- Digital apps, signage and maps

Hopes are high that the project can attract funding for its phase two, which would include a second crossing over the River Esk, alongside further adventure activities including kite surfing or sea kayaking from the Silecroft hub, in addition to further art installations. Phase one will create five direct jobs and 30 indirect jobs.

Julie Betteridge, Copeland Council’s Executive Director, Operations, said: “We are thrilled that we have received the funding for this unique project which gives us an exciting opportunity to develop and diversify the economy, and in doing so, connecting our coast to the Lake District National Park.

“The project will not only create a physical challenge route, but will enable people to explore
Copeland’s art, culture and heritage using the natural environment. It also supports our residents and industries through the provision of a sustainable travel-to-work option.

“We’d like to thank our funders for their commitment to this innovative programme.”

Gary McKeating, Sellafield Ltd ‘s Head of Community and Development, said: “We’re delighted to be supporting this exciting project which will showcase one of Britain’s hidden gems - West Cumbria’s stunning coastline.

“It’s a great example of partners working together to leverage investment into our community.

“The project will build on the best of our past to create new opportunities to grow and diversify our local economy, in line with Sellafield Ltd 's social impact objectives.”

Jake Berry MP, the Coastal Communities Minister, announced the funding as part of a £36million package for coastal projects nationally.

He said: “This is an investment in the future of our coastal communities which builds on their rich heritage and huge potential.

“The world-class attractions and innovative businesses supported by the Coastal Communities Fund will increase tourism, encourage investment and ensure people thrive up and down the Great British Coast.”

Ms Betteridge added: “We understand that a complementary project, for the Coastal Activities Centre in Whitehaven, is on the reserve funding list.

“We hope that in providing further details, Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, with their partners, will in the near future receive good news on this coastal bid.”