

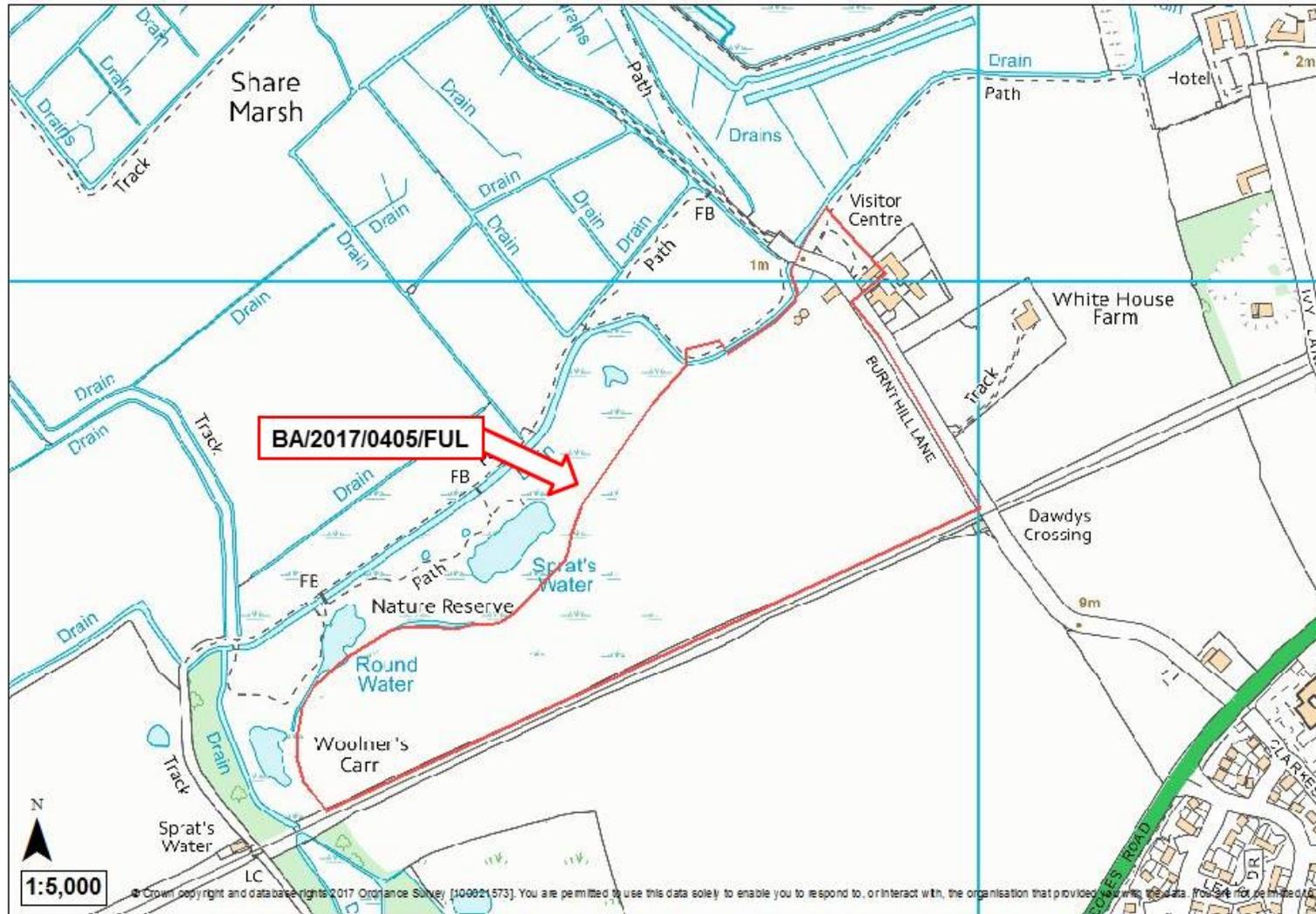
**Reference:**

BA/2017/0405/FUL

**Location**

Study Centre, Burnt Hill Lane, Carlton Colville

**BA/2017/0405/FUL - SWT Study Centre**



**Application for Determination**  
Report by Planning Officer

<b>Parish</b>	Carlton Colville
<b>Reference</b>	BA/2017/0405/FUL <b>Target date</b> 13 February 2018
<b>Location</b>	Study Centre, Burnt Hill Lane, Carlton Colville
<b>Proposal</b>	Erection of a new 'gateway' visitor centre building with viewing deck and outdoor play area for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Oulton and Carlton Marsh Reserves, including a shop and café, and short term accommodation for the interns working with the Trust. An associated new parking area with a new access from Burnt Hill Lane. Change of use of the existing education centre to a single dwelling and conversion of the existing car park area to part domestic garden and car parking associated with the new dwelling, with the remainder reverting to agricultural land.
<b>Applicant</b>	Mr S Aylward
<b>Recommendation</b>	Approve subject to conditions
<b>Reason for referral to Committee</b>	Major Application, Departure (part) and representations received

**1    Description of Site and Proposals**

- 1.1    The subject comprises an area of land to the southern edge of the existing Suffolk Wildlife Trust Carlton & Oulton Marshes Nature Reserve site and encompasses the existing education centre and car park. The site is bounded by Burnt Hill Lane to the east, the Oulton Broad South to Beccles railway line to the south, and Landspring Drain to the north and west. The land rises gently from north to south. In addition there is the existing education centre area which is located on the opposite side of Burnt Hill Lane.
- 1.2    The application site as existing comprises an area of 11.33 hectares made up of arable fields and part nature reserve, with the nature reserve element being designated as Sprat's Water and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Broadland Special Protection (SPA) Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a Ramsar site. Within the arable fields section is a derelict and crumbling farmhouse, and three grain silos. The existing education centre is part of an old barn complex, the remainder of which is in

private residential use. The car park for the centre and nature reserve visitors lies to the front (north) of the education centre.

- 1.3 The SWT nature reserve comprises a number of interlinked or adjacent marshes across a wide expanse of marshland, separated by dykes and drains. The primary route into the nature reserve is via the existing education centre which also features a sizeable car park. The nature reserve currently covers 254 hectares, but SWT is in the process of purchasing an additional 144 hectares which is proposed to convert to areas of reedbed, wet grassland, and fen meadow, an application for which is under consideration under ref BA/2017/0404/FUL.
- 1.4 The proposal is for a new visitor centre building 90m to the south-west of the existing education centre, adjacent to and running parallel with Landspring Drain. In addition to providing resources for visitors to the nature reserve it will also provide a café and shop. The centre will include a large education room, an external education pavilion, a viewing deck facing north across the reserve, a staff room, and storage areas. For unpaid interns working with Suffolk Wildlife Trust two short term bedsit units are proposed.
- 1.5 The existing education centre has a footprint of approximately 207sqm, the proposed visitor centre would have a useable footprint of approximately 448sqm, but taking into account the roof overhang and covered walkways the overall footprint would be approximately 744sqm. The maximum width of the building would be approximately 56 metres, with a depth of approximately 12.5 metres. The height varies due to the proposed design and the sloping nature of the site, the maximum height of the building at its western (tallest) end would be 7.95m, with the main section of the building having a maximum height of 6.25m. The façade of the building would be a mix of frameless structural glass and vertical timber cladding, with a zinc roof.
- 1.6 The proposed visitor centre is a long and narrow building with a central element which runs parallel to Landspring Drain and two wings which are angled gently inwards. It features a 'big wing' mono-pitched roof which runs conversely to the gradient of the land and appears almost level. The building is sited so that the central element is positioned where there is a gap in the trees along Landspring allowing maximum enjoyment of views across the nature reserve, with the wings partly hidden by the trees. The scale of the building is such that it sits comfortably below the tree canopy. The building benefits from a timber terrace which surrounds the building and includes a platform which projects outwards and partly over Landspring.
- 1.7 At ground floor the building is in two sections with an opening through the building at the eastern end of the central element, the design draws focus to the central element which is envisaged as a gateway to the nature reserve as well as providing the main entrance to the visitor centre. The main part of the ground floor section provides the visitor information, café, and education facilities, the smaller ground floor section provides toilets, storage, and office space. The first floor is sited atop the smaller ground floor section and so is

confined to the east wing of the building, with the roof gently sloping upwards at this end, but again comfortably below the tree canopy.

- 1.8 The building is described as a high-quality and sensitive modern design, contrasting with the traditional buildings to the east. It is designed to sit low in the landscape with a muted presence and a scale closely related to the scale and pattern of the row of trees.
- 1.9 Immediately south of the proposed visitor centre is a 'discovery play landscape' which would fill the space between the visitor centre and railway line to the south. The play landscape will predominantly be formed by grass slopes and ramps.
- 1.10 A new car parking area will be provided to the east of the proposed visitor centre, with a new access from Burnt Hill Lane a short distance to the south. The car park would provide 50 parking spaces and 2 coach spaces close to the visitor centre and a further 8 parking spaces close to the entrance from Burnt Hill Lane. In addition there are 65 overflow parking spaces on an area of grass between the new access road and Burnt Hill Lane.
- 1.11 It is proposed to change the existing education centre to a single residential dwelling along with conversion of part of the existing car park area to provide a garden and parking area for the new dwelling, with the remainder of the car park reverting to agricultural land.
- 1.12 Other works include the widening of Landspring Drain where it passes the proposed visitor centre, the provision of improved disabled access, and fencing and access gate along part of Burnt Hill Lane.
- 1.13 The removal of the three grain silos and derelict farmhouse form part of the proposed works.
- 1.14 This application runs parallel to an application for habitat creation under planning ref BA/2017/0404/FUL.
- 1.15 Planning Committee Members undertook a site visit to the application site on 19 January 2018 and the notes of that visit are attached as Appendix 1.

## **2 Site history**

- 2.1 In 2017 a screening opinion request was submitted regarding proposed visitor centre and car park (BA/2017/0288/SCREEN).
- 2.2 In 2016 pre-application advice was given in relation to a new visitor building, car park and possible residential uses of the existing building (BA/2016/0063/PREAPP).

## **3 Consultation**

- 3.1 Consultations received

Carlton Colville Town Council - Response in support of the application.

Oulton Broad Parish Council - No objection.

BA Historic Environment Manager - No objection to this proposal which is welcomed as a very positive outcome in design terms and can therefore be recommended for approval subject to conditions.

BA Landscape Officer - The visitor centre will not be visually intrusive in the long-distance views and the localised visual impact could be mitigated by proposed mounding and screen planting. The play landscape could have an engineered appearance at odds with the location. The location of the car park is acceptable but could be better screened with planting. Overall the visual effect of the development overall is likely to be low/moderate even though it is located within a highly sensitive and designated landscape due to its scale relative to the local context. Generally the development would benefit from additional screen planting around parking areas, and along the boundaries with the Lane and railway line.

BA Ecologist - The HRA and ecology report is clear and comprehensive and provides a firm basis for approval of this application. I am satisfied that with the mitigations in place, the increased visitor use will have negligible impact on the site features, and will therefore not lead to any significant 'in combination' impacts on the reported features.

SCC Highways - The proposed access is at an angle that makes observing the northerly visibility splay difficult for motorists. It is also unclear what visibility splays can be achieved from the proposed access. Please amend the access so that it is more perpendicular to Burnt Hill Lane and provide visibility splays in accordance with DMRB requirements for the traffic speed of Burnt Hill Lane.

SCC Archaeological Service - This site lies in an area of archaeological potential recorded on the County Historic Environment Record. Prehistoric (Neolithic and Bronze Age) remains have been found nearby. The site is also near an area of post medieval banks and ditches. Also, the waterlogged nature of marshes can provide a unique environment for organic remains preservation. Thus, there is high potential for the discovery of below-ground heritage assets of archaeological importance within this area, and groundworks associated with the development have the potential to damage or destroy any archaeological remains which exist. Any permission granted should be the subject of a planning condition to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage asset before it is damaged or destroyed. Two planning conditions and on informative proposed.

Environmental Health - The applicant should submit the appropriate contamination assessment. The NPPF [para. 121] requires that the applicant submits adequate site investigation information and that the land should not be capable of being determined as contaminated land. Suitably worded

conditions are required to ensure that contamination is assessed at the site and any necessary remediation, validation and monitoring is secured. Five planning conditions proposed.

Natural England - We welcome and support this exciting project by Suffolk Wildlife Trust to create a new visitor centre, facilities and experience at its nature reserve provided that the measures contained in the Habitats Regulations Assessment Information Report are implemented in full. Your authority, as competent authority under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations, has screened the proposal to check for the likelihood of significant effects. Your assessment concludes that the proposal can be screened out from further stages of assessment, Natural England concurs with this view.

In terms of Protected Landscapes we support the assessment, made by the Broads Authority's landscape architect regarding the application and agree with proposed conditions regarding the play-moulding and car parking.

Environment Agency - We have no objection to the proposal subject to the condition described below regarding flood risk being included in any permission granted. We also offer advice regarding the private treatment plant. To comply with national policy the application is required to pass the Sequential and Exception Tests and be supported by a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).

### 3.2 Representations received

Four responses were received from residential neighbours which are summarised as follows:

- Visibility at the junction of Burnt Hill Lane with the A146 is poor.
- Concern over lack of modifications to Burnt Hill Lane.
- Lack of turning area for refuse lorries and other large vehicles.
- Conversion of the current education centre should be within existing building envelope.
- Proximity of the proposed car/coach park to residential properties and gardens raise serious concerns related to visual impact, noise and pollution.
- Parking could be provided elsewhere on the site, suggestions of further west and south (away from residential properties).

One response was received from a local business stating the following:

It is hard to overstate the importance of these proposals to the Southern Broads. The opportunity to create a single large 1,000 acre nature reserve will provide a welcome and needed boost both for Broads Tourism as well as the local economy around Oulton Broad. This ambitious project will not only offer an additional attraction for existing visitors to the Broads, but will also attract wildlife enthusiasts who may be drawn to the Broads for the first time.

The wide diversity of new habitat creation is applauded, and the circular walks and viewing structures which form part of the proposals will encourage visitors to explore the reserve and learn about the wildlife on our doorstep; such education will be to the long-term benefit of the Broads.

This is a very exciting project for the Broads and we wholeheartedly support it.

A response was received from Lord Somerleyton who commented that the proposal presents an opportunity to create a new nature tourism destination for the southern Broads that will benefit the wider tourist economy and support the strategic objective of developing a sustainable tourism economy in the southern Broads.

## **4 Policies**

- 4.1 The following Policies have been assessed for consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and have been found to be consistent and can therefore be afforded full weight in the consideration and determination of this application.

### [NPPF](#)

Core Strategy (adopted 2007) [Core Strategy Adopted September 2007 pdf](#)

CS1 - Landscape Protection and Enhancement  
CS2 - Nature Conservation  
CS4 - Creation of New Resources  
CS5 - Historic and Cultural Environments  
CS6 - Archaeology  
CS9 - Sustainable Tourism  
CS11 - Tourism Development  
CS16 - Access to Facilities  
CS17 - Recreational Access  
CS22 - Sites in Employment Use  
CS24 - Location of residential development

Development Management Policies DPD (adopted 2011)  
[Development-Management-DPD2011](#)

DP1 - Natural Environment  
DP2 - Landscape and Trees  
DP3 - Water Quality and Resources  
DP4 - Design  
DP11 - Access on Land  
DP27 - Visitor and Community Facilities  
DP29 - Development on Sites with a High Probability of Flooding

- 4.2 The following Policies have been assessed for consistency with the NPPF and have found to lack full consistency with the NPPF and therefore those aspects of the NPPF may need to be given some weight in the consideration and determination of this application.

Core Strategy (adopted 2007)  
CS19 - Location of Visitor and Tourism Services  
CS20 - Development within Flood Risk Zones

- 4.3 The following Policies have been assessed for consistency with the NPPF which has been found to be silent on these matters. Paragraph 14 of the NPPF requires that planning permission be granted unless the adverse effects would outweigh the benefits.

Development Management Policies DPD (adopted 2011)  
DP12 - Access to the Water

- 4.4 Other Material Considerations

NPPF [NPPF](#)

Landscape Character Assessment Area 6. Waveney Valley – Boundary Dyke Barnby to the Fleet, Oulton.

- 4.5 Neighbourhood plans

There is no neighbourhood plan in force in this area.

## **5 Assessment**

- 5.1 The proposal is for a new visitor centre building, an outdoor play area, a new car park with newly created access from Burnt Hill Lane, and provision of fencing and access gate. The application includes improvements to disabled access and the widening of Landspring Drain where it passes the proposed visitor centre. The existing education centre would be converted to residential. A derelict farmhouse and three grain silos within the site area would be removed. These various elements will be considered separately.

- 5.2 The main issues in the determination of this application are the principle of the development, site layout and design issues, impact on the character and appearance of the area, highways implications, impact on residential amenity, the effect on biodiversity and designated sites, and flood risk.

### Principle of Development

- 5.3 The proposed works are part of a major scheme which would result in the Carlton Marshes site almost doubling in size. In terms of the principle of development, Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) currently manages substantial areas of land in this location but does not have a visitor facility which is functional or appropriate for the type of visitor destination which a nature reserve of the type and size envisioned would require. The proposed visitor centre would deliver the kind of facilities which are commonly expected from a destination such as this and is reasonably comparable in terms of provision of facilities at equivalent nature reserve sites (eg the Norfolk Wildlife Trust site at Cley Marshes). The visitor centre would improve on the facilities currently available at the education centre thereby ensuring that the contribution to education endures. It would contribute to the provision of a gateway facility, encouraging people to visit, understand, and enjoy the nature reserve. The

proposal would also contribute to creating a more accessible visitor destination through the improvement of disabled access and views across the reserve.

- 5.4 The location of the nature reserve is on the edge of Carlton Colville and close to Lowestoft, it has good access via footpaths and the cycle network, in addition to benefitting from a pedestrian/cycle ferry from Waveney River Centre which is sited to the west of Peto's marsh. Although it is expected that the majority of visitors would arrive by car, the site does offer a reasonable range of access opportunities. Importantly the proposal contributes to enabling visitors to access and appreciate this asset and experience landscapes and biodiversity which are emblematic of the Broads National Park, this provides for two of the statutory purposes, and in having no impact on interests of navigation (as the third equal purpose) is therefore considered acceptable in principle.
- 5.5 The existing use of the land which is the subject of this application is agricultural. The retention of land in agricultural use is supported by national policy with the NPPF stating in paragraph 112 that 'Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality'. The site area of 11.33 hectares is not considered significant in terms of size, Natural England maps show that the land is not the best and most versatile agricultural land, and the benefits of the proposal in economic and biodiversity terms, are considered to be sufficient to allow for a loss of this portion of agricultural land in this location. The proposed development is therefore considered acceptable in principle with regard to Policies CS9, CS10, CS11, and CS19 of the Core Strategy, DP14 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

#### Site Layout

- 5.6 The proposed visitor centre is sited 90 metres to the west of the existing visitor centre. When considering the layout of the SWT Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve, the use of surrounding land, and existing accesses to this area, this is the only practical site for such a development. The proposed visitor centre is adjacent to Landspring Drain which at this section marks the transition from marshes to upland areas. SWT are keen to maximise the location potential which works in two ways - firstly, it ensures proximity to the reserve and allows for inclusion of a viewing platform which allows for uninterrupted views across parts of the reserve; secondly it ensures that the visitor centre sits reasonably low in the landscape and when viewed from the reserve would have fields and the edge of Carlton Colville as its backdrop.
- 5.7 The location of the visitor centre utilises a gap in the row of trees which run along this section of Landspring Drain, this allows for the uninterrupted views out which provides a good level of interaction between the visitor centre and the nature reserve it serves, the trees also contribute to the setting of the visitor centres, allowing it to blend with its environment to a reasonable extent,

blurring the wings and lessening its perceived mass. The siting by the trees also allows for the adjacent car park to remain reasonably well hidden by existing landscape features.

- 5.8 The 'discovery play landscape' would have a reasonably soft appearance, with the harder elements located close to the visitor centre which ensures they remain reasonably well hidden from a landscape point of view. The location of the play area is such that it provides a good interaction between the steady presence of the visitor centre and the adjacent pockets of trees, meadows, and designated marsh and water elements.
- 5.9 The layout of the site is therefore considered to be a carefully managed approach which seeks to maximise the site potential and provide an appealing destination point, whilst striking a reasonable balance with the location on the edge of a nature reserve and ensuring that the wider landscape and potential impacts are well considered.

#### Visitor Centre - Design

- 5.10 The proposed visitor centre building has been designed specifically to ensure that the visual impact responds to its setting. It is a long low building which sits below the surrounding tree canopy and is partly hidden by the trees to ensure it assimilates well in its setting, this is augmented by the use of predominantly natural and soft materials which respond well to the landscape and setting. The BA Historic Environment Manager commented that the proposed building and associated landscaping to its immediate environs are considered to be a sensitive yet positive intervention within the landscape. The building is contemporary in terms of form, detail and material (glass, timber and zinc) and is a specific response along with the modified landscape to this sensitive site. The way that the building plan form and the landscaping mirror one another and integrate visually together will help assimilate the building within the immediate landscape in a very pro-active way.
- 5.11 The real key to the success of the design is the way that the modified landscaping provides a transition between the built form and the wider setting of the marshes which are generally open in character. The transition is important in that it introduces the distinctive plan form of the building into the landscape through the use of similar shaped yet naturally visually softer mounds and banks before the "high activity" part of the site then transits to the wider unmodified marsh landscape allowing for quieter and less intense activity within this more tranquil part of the reserve.
- 5.12 The design as proposed provides a sizeable building, however, given the scale of landscape and the site setting in this location, the proposed building is not considered to be excessive. The form of the building itself breaks the relatively large mass of it - the use of angles breaking the mass of the building in long views to it as well as creating visual interest in terms of the composition of the elevations. The fenestration pattern introduces another dimension and has been designed to allow both unobstructed wide and more focussed views from the building. The materials will add a further dimension

introducing matt and reflective qualities and light and shade to the building. Finally the monopitch roof with its large overhang gives a very grounded appearance to the building again helping integrate it visually into its landscape setting.

- 5.13 There is no doubt that the building is of a high quality in terms of its design and has been carefully and thoughtfully produced to react to and sit within its specific landscape setting, making prudent use of the existing landscape features and screening parts of its southern façade through the existing tree line. It will of course be visible and it will represent a fairly significant change within that landscape. The consideration given to the visual relationship of the building and its' surroundings is welcomed and this careful consideration will result in a building which makes a very positive contribution to the character of the immediate site and wider broads setting.
- 5.14 Taking into account the above analysis it is considered that the proposed visitor centre in terms of site layout and design is acceptable and in accordance with Policies CS1 and CS4 of the Core Strategy, Policy DP4 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

#### Visitor Centre - Uses

- 5.15 The proposed visitor centre would replace the existing education centre so that the presence of SWT on site is retained. The existing education facilities would be significantly improved which provides a valuable asset for schools. Included is an education pavilion which allows for outdoor learning, this is sited adjacent to the visitor centre and is suitably designed and located. For members of the public there is an interpretation space to provide an introduction to the whole of the reserve, provision of a retail space and café, and the provision of unisex WCs. This would significantly improve the visitor experience in addition to attracting visitors to the site. The proposed uses are considered to be typical of visitor centres of a reasonable size and complementary to the purpose of the centre in attracting visitors to the nature reserve and augmenting their experience.
- 5.16 The facilities outlined above are all at ground floor level. There is a small first floor area which provides a plant room and two bedsit units for unpaid interns working for the Trust on a short-term basis. Being unpaid, the provision of accommodation is important in attracting candidates, which in turn promotes the viability of the operation, whilst retaining the interns on site is positive from a sustainability point of view. Further, their presence on site does have benefits from a security point of view, although little weight can be given to this as no argument has been made regarding the need for a permanent on-site presence. Given the limitations of the accommodation provided, the short-term occupation of the units by any one individual, and the very low scale provision, it is considered that the inclusion of two bedsits is acceptable subject to condition to ensure the use remains as proposed.

#### Visitor Centre - Landscape

- 5.17 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been submitted with the application, this along with the submitted plans and supporting documents has been assessed by the BA Landscape Architect. It is considered that the proposed visitor centre in the edge of marsh location at the transition point between the marshland and relatively low valley side, together with the scale and massing of the building is acceptable. The building is long and low, and related to the scale and pattern of the row of trees in which it would sit. It would not break the horizon from middle distance views and the LVIA conclusions that the building's form will not be visually intrusive in the long-distance views and the localised visual impact could be mitigated by proposed mounding and screen planting are supported. Taking this assessment into account it is considered that the proposed visitor centre is acceptable in terms of landscape impacts and in accordance with Policies CS1 and CS4 of the Core Strategy, Policy DP2 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

#### Outdoor Play Area - Landscape

- 5.18 The proposed outdoor play area would be sited immediately south of the visitor centre. In essence it comprises two sections, firstly adjacent to the centre is a more conventional provision of harder elements such as a log walk, climbing wall, and rope play net. These could potentially be more intrusive given their appearance, but would remain reasonably well hidden from a landscape point of view as a consequence of their siting on the lower part of the site and adjacent to the visitor centre. The second element is the 'discovery play landscape' immediately south of the more conventional provision, which is in the form of different size crescent slopes and mounds covering an area of approximately 2.9 hectares. Around the perimeter area are areas for picnics, seating, and a path which links to the paths into the nature reserve.
- 5.19 The play landscape is a sizeable addition to the landscape but has been deliberately designed to mirror the visitor centre with gently angled mounds aping the form of the visitor centre to achieve some level of visual integration. It is considered that this will help assimilate the building within the immediate landscape in a very pro-active way and provide a transition between the built form and the wider setting of the marshes which are generally open in character. The proposed mounds are predominantly formed of grass banks, with occasional retaining walls and an ecological retaining wall comprising stacked logs. Views from the marshes will be fronted by the visitor centre and the trees along Landspring Drain, and although the land rises to the south of Landspring it is not so significant as to place the play landscape in a conspicuous elevated position. In addition the backdrop is of the railway line and the northern edge of Carlton Colville, so when viewed from the marshes the site is seen in a context of other built development. It is therefore considered that the proposed outdoor play area is acceptable in terms of landscape impacts with regard to Policies CS1 and CS4 of the Core Strategy, Policy DP2 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

#### Car Park and New Access - Landscape

- 5.20 The proposed car park is sited close to the visitor centre, this allows for reasonable proximity between the two, and also ensures that the car park is lower down in the site as well as being closer to the road and surrounding built forms, thus ensuring that it has limited impact on the wider landscape. It is also proposed for the car park to be dug down into the site to reduce landscape visual impact. This part of the site is reasonably well screened to the north although improvements could be made to the area adjacent to the lane through thickening the existing hedgerow alongside the lane with additional tree and hedge planting to better screen parking from neighbouring properties.
- 5.21 Access to the car park is via a new access road leading off Burnt Hill Lane which is sited approximately 175 metres south of the existing education centre access, and nearly opposite the entrance to White House Farm. The access road runs broadly parallel to Burnt Hill Lane so would not appear incongruous when viewed from surrounding land. Planting is proposed around the entrance which would assist in screening the proposed fences and gate, along with the area of out of hours parking provision. It is therefore considered that the proposed car park and access is acceptable in terms of landscape impacts with regard to Policies CS1 and CS4 of the Core Strategy, Policy DP2 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

#### Car Park - Residential amenity

- 5.22 The existing car park provides 35 spaces immediately north of the education centre; the proposed car park would provide 50 parking spaces and 2 coach spaces close to the visitor centre and a further 8 parking spaces close to the entrance from Burnt Hill Lane. In addition there are 65 overflow parking spaces on an area of grass between the new access road and Burnt Hill Lane.
- 5.23 The existing car park is site approximately 17 metres from the nearest residential property, whilst the proposed car park achieves a minimum separation of approximately 35 metres, which would be, in addition, on the opposite side of Burnt Hill Lane. Whilst it is acknowledged that the level of car parking is increased, along with visitor numbers, the greater separation is considered to be adequate to overcome concerns of an unacceptable impact on residential amenities.
- 5.24 Concerns have been raised by neighbouring residents regarding visual, noise, and air pollution impacts. In the residential properties the majority of windows are at ground floor level and boundary treatments at those properties and along the application site boundary would limit views in and visual impact. Taking into account the pattern of visits to a nature reserve, it is anticipated that arrivals and departures would be spread across the day which would limit any concentration of unacceptable levels of noise or disturbance. In terms of air pollution the proposed car park is sited further from residential properties than the existing one, and it is noted that in moving the access point, cars will no longer drive past the residential properties adjacent to the education

centre. The overflow car park predominantly maintains greater separation than the regular car park and is only anticipated for use when larger events are held. The existing hedgerow alongside the road would benefit from being thickened with additional tree and hedge planting to better screen parking from neighbouring properties which would assist in allaying some concerns raised, it is proposed to secure this by condition. Taking the existing car park size and siting into account, and having regard to the responses received from neighbouring residents, it is considered that on balance the proposed car park is acceptable in terms of residential amenity, with regard to Policy DP28 of the Development Management Policies DPD.

#### Change of Use of Education Centre to Residential

- 5.25 The existing education facility forms part of a barn complex which was formerly part of the local farm. The barns have been converted into five residential dwellings accessed from a central courtyard and all with their own private amenity space. The only exception is the SWT education centre which is different in use as well as being slightly different in appearance to the main style of barn within the complex.
- 5.26 Taking into account the principal use of the barn complex, it makes sense in planning terms for the vacated education centre to be converted to a residential unit, this would allow a use comparable and compatible with the other uses within the complex and provide a uniform approach to the site which has the benefit of ensuring that a suitable appearance and form of occupation are maintained.
- 5.27 It is noted that the site is not within a defined development boundary and therefore a change of use to residential would in principle be contrary to Policy DP22. However, the habitat creation and visitor centre works to be undertaken by SWT are the subject of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid, and part of the components of a bid such as this is that any funds are match funded. In order to provide these funds SWT have been fund raising through an appeal, and whilst this will contribute a significant amount, further funding will be required and SWT intend to raise this through the sale of the existing centre. This element is integral to the viability of the project. On balance, it is considered that, taking into account the site specific and application specific circumstances, the proposed change of use to residential is considered acceptable and the departure from policy can be justified.
- 5.28 The internal floor area of the education centre is more than sufficient for providing a residential unit, therefore no extensions are proposed, only alterations to the internal layout. A single change to the external southern elevation is proposed to provide a window opening in place of a pair of boarded doors, this is considered to be in keeping with the character of the property and would not undermine the privacy of neighbouring residents.
- 5.29 To the immediate north of the education centre is the existing car park, approximately half of this will form amenity space and a parking area for the new residential dwelling, using the existing access from Burnt Hill Lane. The

size of the amenity space provision is broadly equivalent to the amenity space at the other residential units. The remainder of the car park will be returned to agricultural use and opened up as part of the larger field to the east. The proposed layout of existing car park is considered to be acceptable in landscape terms as it accords with adjacent development and contributes to a regularised appearance.

- 5.30 Current residents at the barn complex raised concerns regarding refuse vehicles which currently use the education centre car park to turn around, as do other large vehicles. The loss of the car park would remove any possible turning area. These issues were raised by residents with SWT who have proposed a turning area broadly opposite the access to the barn complex courtyard, this would ensure that large vehicles still have an area suitable area for turning.
- 5.31 A bat survey was carried out and no evidence of bats was found in the education centre building. The submitted assessment found that the proposals would be unlikely to impact upon roosting bats and there is no requirement for a Natural England European Protected Species Licence.
- 5.32 The proposed change of use of the existing education centre to a residential dwelling, taking into account the particular funding requirements and the existing uses of the remainder of the barn complex of which it forms a part is considered acceptable with regard to Policies DP1, DP2, DP4, and DP28 of the of the Development Management Policies DPD.

#### Removal of Grain Silos and Derelict Cottage

- 5.33 The application includes the proposed removal of three grain silos and a derelict cottage (this also described as two cottages). The cottage is only half standing and is in a dangerous state in addition to being a blemish on the landscape, its removal is welcomed. Adjacent to the cottage are three grain silos which do not sit well in the landscape and would be incongruous to the new development on the land, and their removal is welcomed. No evidence of bats emerging from the derelict building was found, although it is recommended that any works to the building should take place outside of the hibernation season (October – March) and outside of the bird breeding season (April – August). There is no requirement for a Natural England European Protected Species Licence.

#### Highways

- 5.34 The proposed visitor centre would be accessed via Burnt Hill Lane, this runs directly north-west from the A146 and crosses a railway at an unmanned, barrier controlled level crossing on its way to the site. The route of access is the same as for the existing centre with the only change being the siting of the access to the nature reserve car park. It is anticipated that visitor numbers will more than double once the new reserve has become an established feature in the Southern Broads offering, and it is acknowledged that local residents have raised concerns over the suitability of Burnt Hill Lane. The

proposal has been considered by Suffolk County Council as Highways Authority, who are satisfied that the pattern of use would not result in concentration of visitor numbers/times in such a way as to compromise highway safety and that school groups are proposed to comprise a significant % of the anticipated visitor numbers.. An issue was raised in relation to the angle of the access from Burnt Hill Lane to the new access road, it was advised that the entrance should be perpendicular to Burnt Hill Lane, this amendment has been made and as such the proposal is considered acceptable.

- 5.35 Network Rail were consulted over the proposed increase in use of the level crossing on Burnt Hill Lane and raised no objection to the application.
- 5.36 Taking this assessment into account it is considered that the proposed visitor centre, car park and access road are acceptable in highway terms and in accordance with Policy CS16 of the Core Strategy and Policy DP11 of the Development Management Policies DPD.

#### Visitors to the site

- 5.37 The proposal seeks to provide good access around the visitor centre and surrounding walkways to suit people of all abilities. In conjunction with the parallel application for habitat creation (BA/2017/0404/FUL) this will markedly improve access around the site and enjoyment of the site compared to the existing situation without compromising the biodiversity interest.
- 5.38 Research submitted as part of this proposal indicates that visitor numbers are expected to significantly increase from 50,000 per year to 120,000 per year as a result of the enlargement of the reserve and habitat creation (considered under the parallel application BA/2017/0404/FUL), and the provision of much improved visitor facilities, the subject of this application. Increased recreational pressure has the potential to result in a number of different impacts on various ecological receptors including increased tramping of fen vegetation and disturbance of breeding birds. Potential impacts have been catalogued and addressed, and a suite of mitigation measures proposed which will limit potential impacts to a level which is considered appropriate to the status and operation of the site. The proposed mitigation measures are considered appropriate and their implementation will be subject to a planning condition.
- 5.39 Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposed scheme and consequent projected increase in visitors will not have an unacceptable impact on biodiversity and the protected status of the site, the proposal is therefore, subject to mitigation, considered to be in accordance with Policy DP1 and DP11 of the Development Management Policies, and CS11 of the Core Strategy.
- 5.40 The path at the southern edge of Share Marsh includes elements within the designated area (SSSI, SAC, SPA, and Ramsar site), there is an existing surfaced path which is sited north of Landspring Drain, this also runs along a

boundary of the designated area and also partly through it. The proposed path would provide the opportunity to create a circular walk utilising these two surface paths, but to link the two paths would require the installation of 80m length of timber boardwalk across an area of wet woodland which is within the designated area. The submitted documents state that the installation of the boardwalk will require the removal of a small number of semi mature alder trees plus the crossing of a shaded ditch and the south-west corner of Round Water. From Round Water it will continue along the route of the existing nature trail, which comprises short mown grass, before crossing through an area of tall reed and sallow scrub to link with the existing public footpath to the north of the Landspring. To cross Landspring an earth bund with culverted pipe would be installed with the boardwalk atop. The proposed works and potential impacts on the designated sites have been assessed and no objections were raised from relevant consultees. The boardwalk would utilise natural materials, its design and route selection has minimised the overall length as well as the amount of vegetation clearance that is required, and taking into account the improvement in terms of access and understanding of this section of the site, is considered to be acceptable with regard to the site designations, subject to appropriate mitigation.

- 5.41 Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposed development will improve the landscape character of this site, and would provide notable improvements to the access and enjoyment of the site befitting its nature reserve operation. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable with regard to Policies DP2 and DP4 of the Development Management Policies DPD, Policies CS1, CS4, CS11, and C16 of the Core Strategy, and the NPPF.

#### Biodiversity

- 5.42 The main thrust of the overall scheme, comprising the two parallel applications, is to provide the visitor with a comprehensive experience of a mosaic of wetland habitats to exist alongside and complement the existing nature reserve.
- 5.43 Consideration must be had through extensive surveys for potential negative impacts associated with the construction period. This informs a mitigation scheme which would ensure that no significant residual impacts during construction occur. The BA Ecologist commented that the HRA and ecology report is clear and comprehensive and provides a firm basis for approval of this application.
- 5.44 The proposal will involve the widening of the Landspring Drain which forms the boundary of the designated sites and the installation of the decking in front of the centre partially over Landspring. The proposed widened portion is 29 metres in length, this will ultimately create additional habitat. In addition a ramped access is proposed at the western end of the widened Drain. There is potential for impacts during construction phase but subject to appropriate mitigation this will not have an unacceptable impact on the designated sites.

- 5.45 Two species of rare mollusc were recorded in the section of the Landspring Dyke which will be affected by the proposed development. It is proposed that molluscs will be translocated to suitable habitat close to the proposed donor area. The implementation of mitigation measures will ensure that there will be no adverse impact on the integrity of the designated site in relation to the rare invertebrates qualifying feature.
- 5.46 Otters are known to forage across Carlton Marshes and the surrounding area, although no evidence of them was found along the Landspring Dyke during the survey in 2017. Mitigation measures are proposed to ensure that construction activities do not result in any impact on otters.
- 5.47 Construction of the visitor centre could result in potential sources of disturbance to nesting and wintering birds, it is considered that sufficient habitat is available an acceptable distance from the construction area, therefore construction activities are not likely to result in an adverse impact on nesting and wintering birds.
- 5.48 There is the potential for harm to exist in the form of visitors to the site and it is important that this aspect is managed. Mitigation measures are proposed to address potential impacts, such as restricting access to the most sensitive areas of the site. The BA Ecologist commented that 'I am satisfied that with the mitigations in place, the increased visitor use will have negligible impact on the site features, and will therefore not lead to any significant 'in combination' impacts on the reported features'.
- 5.49 Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposed scheme will not result in an impact on the integrity of the designated sites on its own, and there are no pathways for in-combination effects. Subject to appropriate mitigation measures the development is considered to be in accordance with Policy DP1 of the Development Management Policies DPD, Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy, and the NPPF.

#### Designated sites

- 5.50 In terms of potential impact on the designated areas of the site (SSSI, SAC, SPA, and Ramsar site), these are informed by an HRA the purpose of which is to ensure that the proposals will not have an adverse effect on internationally designated wildlife sites. This assessment has been compiled for Suffolk Wildlife Trust as there is a likely significant effect to an internationally designated wildlife sites as a result of this proposal.
- 5.51 The appropriate assessment has been provided for the Broads Authority and Natural England to consider and it identified a range of impacts that could occur during the construction period and/or the subsequent management of the reserve. Mitigation measures to either avoid or minimise any significant effects as identified have been incorporated into the design and management proposals and it has been concluded that none of the impacts will result in any adverse effects on the integrity of any of the designated sites and their qualifying features (habitats and species).

- 5.52 The BA Ecologist commented that the HRA is clear and comprehensive and provides a firm basis for approval of this application, whilst Natural England, as a statutory consultee, are satisfied that the mitigation measure proposed are acceptable.
- 5.53 Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposal, subject to appropriate mitigation, is unlikely to adversely affect any of the designated sites, namely Broadland Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site, Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Sprat's Water and Marshes, Carlton Colville SSSI. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with the relevant sections of Policy DP1 of the Development Management Policies DPD, Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy.

### Flood Risk

- 5.54 The proposed visitor centre is partly located within Flood Zones 2 and 3, the car park and outdoor play areas are located outside these flood zones. A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted which concludes that the risk of internal flooding can be mitigated by setting floor levels above the design floor level, and that there is no viable risk of pluvial flooding. This has been reviewed by the Environment Agency who raised no objection subject to appropriate conditions.
- 5.55 The visitor centre includes short-term accommodation, so the proposed development requires application of the sequential and exception test as set out in paragraphs 101 and 102 of the NPPF. The sequential test seeks to steer new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding if reasonable and appropriate sites are available. The exception test requires that the development must provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk, and that a flood risk assessment must demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime and not increase flood risk elsewhere. The visitor centre itself is partly located in Flood Zones 2 and 3, however this location has been selected to ensure that the building is at the foot of the low valley side, this would limit potential impacts on landscape character and allow for the building to appear nestled in the tree belt along Landspring Drain, it is therefore considered to be the appropriate location on site for the proposed building. To site the building further north would have impacts on the landscape, and would alter the site layout so that other potential impacts on landscape character would arise. The proposed development would have demonstrable benefits to the public which would outweigh any potential flood risk and the development is considered to be safe for its lifetime, this being informed by a flood risk assessment. The development has been assessed as appropriately flood resilient and resistant, subject to mitigation and conditions.
- 5.56 The existing education centre is located within Flood Zone 1, therefore the conversion to residential is considered acceptable in flood risk terms.

- 5.57 Flood Response Plans have been submitted for the proposed visitor centre and the residential conversion. These include details of the degree of flood risk at the site, list appropriate preparation for flood events, outlines flood evacuation procedures, and shows the proposed route of evacuation. It is noted that during any significant flood events SWT will close the reserve to the public.
- 5.58 Having regard to the above it is considered that the proposal is acceptable and in accordance with Policy CS20 of the Core Strategy, Policy DP29 of the Development Management Policies DPD, and the NPPF.

### Foul and Surface Water

- 5.59 For disposal of foul water, connection to the main sewer is not viable because of the significant distance from the main sewer and the need to cross two roads and a railway line which would be cost prohibitive. Foul water from the development will be treated via a package sewage treatment system, water will then be pumped to a ground infiltration system approximately 150m south of the visitor centre from where the treated water will infiltrate back into the soil. The supporting documents contend that an appropriate system combined with a tertiary filtration system would remove sufficient quantities of pollutants including phosphates. It will be necessary to request details of any proposed system to ensure that any discharge is acceptable and will not have an adverse impact on soil quality, habitat, or nearby designated sites.
- 5.60 A geotechnical site investigation was undertaken for the site and this has confirmed that a soakaway system can be utilised for surface water drainage of the new visitor centre site. A sustainable urban drainage system (SUDS) is to be utilised for the car park area to allow the free drainage of surface water. Water from car park surfaces will pass through oil interceptor infrastructure to prevent any such contaminants reaching the SUDs infiltration system. The HRA information concludes that this technique is sufficient to ensure that the proposed development will not result in an adverse impact on the integrity of the designated site in relation to the natural eutrophic lakes qualifying feature.
- 5.61 With regard to the above assessment it is considered that the proposal is acceptable and in accordance with Policy CS4 of the Core Strategy and Policy DP3 of the Development Management Policies DPD.

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 The proposal would be significant in providing a gateway facility to the nature reserve which would allow for improved services for visitors and improved facilities for education. The loss of agricultural land is considered to be acceptable taking into account the benefits of the scheme. The proposal would improve access and visitor experience at the site and related infrastructure including an outdoor play area and car park are considered acceptable. The proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on landscape character of the site and surrounding area, and would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on residential amenity or privacy. It is

considered that there would not be a significant adverse impact on the SSSI and flood risk, and no objection has been raised in terms of highway safety. The change of use of the existing education centre to residential is considered acceptable and would provide vital match funding to help finance the proposed works. Overall the proposals represent a significant advance for the nature reserve and would contribute to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust ambitions in realising its long term plans and aspirations for this site.

## **7 Recommendation**

Approve subject to conditions

- i. Standard time limit;
- ii. In accordance with submitted plans;
- iii. Mitigation measures and monitoring plan;
- iv. Long-term (min. 10 year) combined landscape/ arboriculture/ ecological management plan
- v. Timing for removal of hedgerows, trees, shrubs or climbing plants;
- vi. Details of materials;
- vii. Large scale details of joinery;
- viii. Flood risk measures;
- ix. Finished floor levels;
- x. Timescale for demolition of derelict dwelling and removal of silos;
- xi. Details of type and siting of foul sewage private treatment plant;
- xii. Details of proposed SUDS scheme;
- xiii. Details of planting along Burnt Hill Lane boundary and railway line boundary;
- xiv. Details of signage;
- xv. Details of lighting scheme;
- xvi. Details of boundary treatment to residential;
- xvii. Programme of archaeological work;
- xviii. Contaminated land - site investigation
- xix. Contaminated land - remediation
- xx. Remove permitted development rights; and
- xxi. Restriction on use of bedsit accommodation

Informatives

- i. Environmental Permit
- ii. Effluence discharge
- iii. Archaeological investigation brief
- iv. Demolition process
- v. Working practices

## **8 Reason for Recommendation**

The proposal is considered to be in accordance with Policies CS1, CS4, CS9, CS10, CS11, CS16, CS19, and CS20 of the Core Strategy (2007), Policies DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4, DP11, DP14, DP28, and DP29 of the Development

Plan Document (2011), and the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) which is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

Background papers: Application File BA/2017/0405/FUL

Author: Nigel Catherall

Date of Report: 19 January 2018

List of Appendices: Appendix 1 – Location Plan  
Appendix 2 – Notes of Site Visit

BA/2017/0405/FUL - SWT Study Centre



**PLANNING COMMITTEE**

2 February 2018

**Note of site visit held on Friday 19 January 2018**

**BA/2017/0405/FUL and BA2017/0404/FUL Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve,  
Carlton Colville, Oulton Broad**

Erection of new visitor centre and conversion of existing education centre to single dwelling (BA/2017/0405/FUL).

Habitat Creation within two blocks of arable marsh (BA2017/0404/FUL)

**Applicant:** Suffolk Wildlife Trust

**Present:**

Sir Peter Dixon– in the Chair

Prof Jacquie Burgess	Ms Gail Harris
Mr Mike Barnard	Mrs Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro (Suffolk
Mr Bill Dickson	County Council

**Also Present:**

Ms Jill Tyler – Carlton Colville Town Council  
Mr Jason Rodwell – Carlton Colville Town Council  
Mr Ben Falat – Oulton Broads Parish Council

**In attendance:**

Mrs Sandra A Beckett – Administrative Officer (BA)  
Ms Marie-Pierre Tighe – Director of Strategic Services BA)  
Mr Nigel Catherhall– Planning Officer (BA)

Mr Julian Roughton – The Applicant Director Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT)  
Mr Steve Aylward – The Applicant, Property Services Manager (SWT)  
Ms Dorothy Casey – Conservation Officer, (SWT)  
Mr Matt Gooch – Carlton Marshes Reserve Warden (SWT)  
Ms Jo Shackleton – Education Officer (SWT)  
Mr Jeremy Halls – Agent for Applicant BA/2017/0404/FUL

**Apologies for absence** were received from: Mr Paul Rice, Mr Haydn Thirtle  
Mr Vic Thomson and Mr John Timewell.

**Apologies also received** from Mr Frank Mortimer and Mrs Trish Mortimer, Oulton  
Ward, Waveney District Council, Paul Light – Carlton Colville ward, Waveney District  
Council

## **Introduction**

The Chairman of the Planning Committee welcomed everyone and invited them to introduce themselves.

The Chairman reminded members of the procedures for the site visit emphasising that it was purely fact finding and no decisions would be made at this visit but the matter would be considered in detail at the next meeting of the Planning Committee on 2 February 2018. He reminded them to avoid discussing the merits of the application, to keep together as a group when moving round the site and not enter into debate. Members were on the visit to aid their understanding of the proposed developments in the context of their rural and isolated locations, and the nature and scale of the works proposed. It was also to make sure that all the relevant factors of the site had been pointed out. They were able to ask questions.

Members met in the existing visitor centre for the Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. The Planning Officer provided a presentation of the plans for the site. Members were given the opportunity to view the various different elements associated with the two applications with a walk to the site of the application for the proposed new visitor centre and then taken by mini bus to the flood wall to view the second application for habitat creation on Petos Marsh and Share Marsh.

### ***The Site Context and Plans***

The Planning Officer provided a detailed power point presentation of both of the applications firstly providing the context of the applications, explaining that the Site was adjacent to the River Waveney and Oulton Broad, the village of Carlton Colville and near Lowestoft at the southern end of the Broads National Park, an important element in the application. The sites of the applications contained or were adjacent to SSSI, SAC, SPA, and Ramsar designations.

#### ***BA/2017/0405/FUL Plans of Visitor Centre and associated facilities***

The Planning Officer pointed out the site of the proposed new visitor centre to be set in 2.9 hectares, adjacent to the Lands Spring Drain which marked the transition from marshes to upland areas, the access, car parking elements as well as discovery play landscape, and the details of the actual building comprising café, shop, a large education room, external education pavilion, viewing deck facing north across the reserve, a staff room, office and storage areas. The building would also provide accommodation comprising two short term bedsit units for unpaid interns of the SWT.

The Planning Officer provided clarification on the orientation of the building particularly that of the large windows/ glassed areas and viewing points, and the sloping elements of the roofline. He explained that the café area would look out over the Reserve.

The applicants explained the function of the building. The aim of the application was to do more than to provide a building but to provide an improved connection with the landscape and the nature reserve. They wished the centre to be more family

orientated and encourage a wider variety and a broader spectrum of visitors both from the locality and beyond and give them opportunities to explore the landscape as well as the wildlife. At present much of the footfall was school parties and groups.

The applicants also clarified that the Trust had two or three interns per year and these were currently accommodated locally. By providing such facilities on the premises would be more beneficial to the staff as well as help in terms of security. Such facilities were well used at other wildlife reserves and it was expected that these would be fully occupied.

In answer to Members' questions it was explained that there were no plans for solar panels. The building had the advantage of ground source heating and electricity was on a green tariff.

Other aspects of the application included converting the existing visitor centre into residential accommodation as a four bedroomed house. The existing car park would be used for amenity space for the dwelling. This part of the application would be the "enabling development" element and part of the Heritage lottery Funding bid. This aspect would be a departure from the development plan.

#### *Access and Highways*

The Planning Officer explained that originally there had been concerns expressed by local residents about the access and they had some issues in relation to the suitability of Burnt Hill Lane and visibility displays. However, the Highways Authority was content with the amendments made and incorporated into the actual application. The route of access would be the same as for the existing centre with the only change being the siting of the access to the nature reserve car park. It was anticipated that visitor numbers would be more than double once the new reserve had become an established feature in the Southern Broads. However, the proposal had been considered by Suffolk County Council as Highways Authority, who were satisfied that the pattern of use would not result in concentration of visitor numbers/times in such a way as to compromise highway safety and that school groups are proposed to comprise a significant % of the anticipated visitor numbers.

Mr Falat from Oulton Broad Parish Council explained the boundary of Oulton Broads Parish Council and that of Carlton Colville. He commented that Oulton Broad Parish Council had supported the application in outline and confirmed that it had been concerned about the exit onto the main road. They had met and been in negotiations with a local bus company with the proposal to have an additional bus stop. They were overall in support of the proposal as it would provide improved tourism access as well as access for the local population.

Ms Tyler from Carlton Colville Town Council commented that the Town Council was fully behind the application seeing it as an excellent additional facility not only for tourism but opportunity to get local people into the countryside.

*BA/2017/0404/FUL Plans of Habitat Creation.*

The Planning Officer provided a presentation of the Habitat Creation Application BA/2017/0404/FUL which had been prepared by the Trust's staff with the help of Jeremy Halls, (previously involved with the site in relation to BESL flood defence applications) The application involved the creation of predominantly reed bed habitat on Petos Marsh, which had until recently been used as arable, and wet grassland and fen on Share Marsh. The Planning Officer set out the details for the habitat creation involving reinstatement of dykes, open water pools and water control structures. These formed part of the plans to create 1,000 acres of wetland and to make this more accessible to the public. It included the construction of improved access routes, hides and viewing platforms.

***On Site context:***

*Visitor Centre, car park etc. BA/2017/0405/FUL*

Following the presentation with additional clarification from officers, Members were able to walk across the lane to the site of the proposed Visitor Centre, the extent of which was marked out by ranging poles. The overall footprint would be approximately 744sqm. The maximum width of the building would be approximately 56 metres, with a depth of approximately 12.5 metres. The height varied due to the proposed design and the sloping nature of the site, the maximum height of the building at its western (tallest) end would be 7.95m, with the main section of the building having a maximum height of 6.25m.

Members walked passed the old existing dilapidated red brick building, formerly farm cottages for White House Farm, noting that this would be demolished. In addition the three green silos adjacent to this would also be removed.

Members noted that the Centre would be set at the bottom of sloping ground at a level higher than the marshes onto which it would look out onto but lower than the residential development to the south. They noted the backdrop of the houses to the south, behind the railway line and A146 road, the SWT workshop barn as well as former barn complex now in residential use immediately behind the existing visitor centre. It was noted that the entire field in which members were standing would be part of the context for the visitor centre and provide an informal play area with low mounds arranged in a rough horseshoe shape. It was noted that these would not be high and would follow the existing contours being mostly of grasses. It was intended that the only structures for play which would not be of natural materials, would be sited nearer to the visitor centre itself and being set in the lowest part of the area, they would not intrude into the wider landscape. It was suggested that about 50% of the building would be screened by trees and the height of the building would be less than two-thirds of the existing height of the trees.

Members noted the siting of the car park designed to provide 50 spaces as well as the overflow parking area in relation to neighbouring properties. This would be screened from the residential area.

***On Site Context: Habitat Creation (BA/2017/0404/FUL)***

Members took the coach down the track within the reserve to the floodwall at the foot of Petos Marsh. They walked onto the flood wall to get a view of Petos marsh to the north and Share Marsh to the south. They noted the extent of Petos Marsh being bounded by Oulton Dyke to the east and the River Waveney to the west, noting the Waveney River centre as a land mark on the opposite side of the River Waveney. It was noted that the previous landowner had attempted to use Petos Marsh as arable. It was currently an area of rough grassland although reed was naturally growing through. It was intended to restore the area to reed bed, opening up and creating a more detailed dyke system with open water pools. There would be sluices for water management and two open viewing platforms 2.5 – 3 metres in height of Scandinavian design. Members also viewed the Share Marsh area where there would be fewer dykes with a predominance of wet grassland and fen meadow.

From the floodwall, Members were able to view the site of the proposed visitor centre and play area set between trees, behind which would be the proposed car parking area. It was noted that the aim was for this to sit and merge within the landscape.

It was noted that it would be helpful to provide visuals of the hides and viewing platforms during the planning committee presentation for the benefit of members who were not able to attend the visit.

Having viewed the whole site members returned to the coach for departure.

### **Conclusion and Procedures**

The Chairman confirmed that the application would be considered by the Committee at the next scheduled meeting on 2 February 2018. The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the site inspection.

The meeting was closed at 11.45 am.