

Application for Determination

Parish	Beccles Town Council
Reference	BA/2009/0254/FUL Target date 11 December 2009
Location	Beccles Yacht Station, Fen Lane, Beccles
Proposal	Installation of 15 mooring posts and change of use of from visitor moorings to private moorings
Applicant	Mr Simon Bellamy (Waveney District Council)
Recommendation	Approve

1 Description of Site and Proposals

- 1.1 Beccles quay is situated at the southern end of the Broads Network, approximately 500 metres north of Beccles town centre and 140 metres south of the main A146 road which runs from Norwich to Lowestoft.
- 1.2 To the immediate north and east of the quay lies an area of open amenity space in which is a small children's play area. To the south is a smaller area of open amenity space, the Yachtmaster's office, a small cafe, a tourist information office and an area of car parking. Across the river to the west is a flat landscape of agricultural fields.
- 1.3 The quay is situated directly off the River Waveney. The quay currently provides a total of 109 moorings comprising 81 casual visitor moorings and 28 permanent, private moorings. It is run by Waveney District Council and a charge is made for the use of the moorings.
- 1.4 The River Waveney has an important recreational role as part of the Broads river system and Beccles is one of the main riverside centres on the southern rivers. Beccles quay is the 'starting point' for both water-borne and land-based visitors to the town, and Beccles is one of the most important 'gateway' towns into the southern Broads area. There are a number of boatyards in the area surrounding the quay providing a range of services for boat users, and during the summer the Broads Authority operates boat trips of the southern Broads from the quay and a tourist information centre close to the quay.
- 1.5 The moorings are serviced by an onsite Yachtmaster, with an office on the quayside itself. The Yachmaster collects fees, ensures boats are moored correctly and generally ensures the smooth running of the site. The position of Yachtmaster was a permanent, year round position until this November, when

the role was changed to a seasonal position operating only in the busier summer months.

- 1.6 Other services provided at the moorings are restricted; there are no showers or toilets on the quayside and only a small cafe and shop sited on the quayside itself. Nevertheless, the quay is well situated and lies within a few hundred metres of Beccles town centre and all the associated amenities.
- 1.7 The casual moorings at Beccles Quay offer short and medium stay moorings for visitors, with rates for short stays of up to 1 hour, and longer stays of periods of 24 hours or more.
- 1.8 This is a retrospective application for the retention of 15 mooring posts set within the basin located on the north side of the quay, and for the change of use of these 15 moorings from casual to private moorings, to be leased on an annual basis. Prior to the installation of the posts the whole of the quay was available as casual moorings, with the exception of a small section providing 28 private moorings in the eastern corner of the quay. Change of use of the 15 moorings would leave 66 moorings available as casual visitor moorings, with the remaining 43 let annually as private mooring. The posts have been installed and the applicants were subsequently advised that the works required planning consent.
- 1.9 The mooring posts themselves are wooden, measure 20 cm in diameter and protrude from the water by approximately 1.8 metres. The posts are sited in a line running parallel to the northern bank of the quay, set back approximately 6 metres into the river. The posts follow the line of a number existing mooring posts at the eastern end of the quay. The new posts that are the subject of this application are identical to this row of posts already installed in the eastern corner of the quay, which are used to mark out the private moorings in this section of the quay.

2 Site History

None.

3 Consultation

Beccles Town Council

The Committee unanimously agreed to refuse as they believe navigation of these moorings would be extremely tight and if these 16 moorings are given over to private ownership, it would have a detrimental affect on the tourism industry of Beccles.

Broads Society – No response received.

District Member – No response received.

Beccles Society - No response received.

4 Representations

None received.

5 Policy

5.1 Core Strategy – Development Plan Document (Adopted Policies)

Policy CS1 Development and changes in land use / management must ensure that all aspects of the environmental and cultural assets of the Broads' distinctive landscape are protected, enhanced and restored. Proposals should ensure opportunities for positive impacts on the following core assets have been addressed and adverse impacts avoided:

- (i) the defining and distinctive qualities of the varied landscape character areas formed by the built and natural environment
- (ii) tranquillity and wilderness as part of the Broads experience;
- (iii) the value and integrity of nature conservation interest; and
- (iv) the character, appearance and integrity of the historic and cultural environment

Opportunities to mitigate the visual impact of currently intrusive features should be sought.

CS9 The tourism base in the Broads will be supported, widened and strengthened by:

- (i) Encouraging a network of tourism and recreational facilities throughout the system and protecting against the loss of existing services;
- (ii) Protecting waterside employment sites to contribute to the local economy;
- (iii) Incorporating employment uses in new schemes;

Policy CS10 Gateways and entrances between the Broads and settlements will be created and those already existing will be enhanced.

Policy CS14 The provision of a range of additional short and long-term visitor moorings will be encouraged in order to ensure that visitor moorings are available in appropriate locations and where they are most needed, where they contribute to the management of a safe and attractive waterway, and in settlements where services and facilities are available.

5.2 Broads Local Plan

C12 - Open space, common land and staithe

Development will not be permitted if it would have a significant adverse effect on open space, common land or land at parish or public staithe which is identified on the Proposals Map or which otherwise:

- a) makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Broads landscape, waterways or built environment; or
- b) is important for wildlife or is an important wildlife habitat.

6 Assessment

- 6.1 This is an application for the retention of 15 mooring posts and the change of use of 15 moorings from casual to private moorings, reducing the number of casual visitor moorings at Beccles Quay from 81 to 66. The application is effectively in two parts – firstly for the retention of the physical structures and secondly for the change of use.
- 6.2 In terms of retention of the structures, the posts are certainly a noticeable feature in the landscape of the quayside and do, by virtue of their size, position and very new condition, stand out. It is considered, however, that the posts are virtually identical in form and materials to the existing line of mooring posts in this eastern section of the quay, and that they constitute a type of development that is not out of place in the context of a working quayside. The process of weathering will integrate the posts into the landscape, thereby reducing their visual impact.
- 6.3 Although the posts are set close together, there is adequate space for manoeuvre into and out of the moorings with no negative impact on navigation. Accordingly, it is considered that the installation of the mooring posts would not have a significant adverse impact on the quay, and so are in accordance with saved Policy C12 of the Broads Local Plan.
- 6.4 The second consideration is that of the change of use; this requires an assessment of the impact of the loss of 15 casual moorings and their replacement with 15 private moorings let on an annual basis. Adopted Core Strategy Policy CS9 states that the tourism base in the Broads will be supported, widened and strengthened by encouraging a network of tourism and recreational facilities throughout the system and protecting against the loss of existing services, whilst Policy CS10 states gateways and entrances between the Broads and settlements will be created and those already existing will be enhanced. Policy CS14 states that the Broads Authority will encourage the provision of a range of visitor moorings to ensure moorings are available where they are most needed. This policy makes specific reference to provision of visitor moorings in settlements where facilities are available, and to the protection and enhancement of existing facilities. In the light of these policies, and the objective to support the holiday economy, the loss of casual moorings must be considered carefully.
- 6.5 In support of this application the applicant has submitted information indicating that recent levels of use of the 81 casual moorings is generally low, with the number of moorings used on any one day exceeding 60 on only 4 occasions in the period between April 2006 and October 2008, and demand never exceeding 66 moorings in any one single day. The figures highlight the fact that there have been only 22 days out of a total of 642 where 50% occupancy has been achieved. It is noted that the figures do not include the 2009 season, which has been better than average in terms of boat numbers throughout the Broads,

however the applicant advises that the quay has never been at full capacity in the 2009 season nonetheless.

- 6.6 These numbers suggest that the loss of 15 moorings to private annual use would have a limited impact, and that in real terms the reduction would not result in tourist boats being unable to moor in the quay due to a lack of available moorings. Rather, it would address an issue of over-supply of casual moorings in this particular location.
- 6.7 Beccles Quay makes a significant contribution to the tourist network in this area along the River Waveney both in terms of moorings and providing access to facilities. There are, however, 9 other mooring sites along the approximately 25 kilometre (15.5 mile) stretch of the Waveney between Geldeston and St Olaves, offering a total of 43 overnight casual moorings and additional casual moorings available on Oulton Broad; there are also opportunities for mooring informally along the Waveney. The sites on the Waveney are spread relatively evenly along the river, typically offering between 3 and 5 moorings per site. Although no usage statistics have been supplied for these sites it is considered that they represent a network of sites offering casual moorings, and that this network would remain unaffected by a modest reduction in the number of casual moorings provided at Beccles Quay.
- 6.8 The Waterways Directorate have raised an objection to the proposal on the grounds of the principle of the loss of the casual moorings which, it is considered, will place further pressure on the Broads Authority's 24 hour moorings elsewhere in Beccles which are already well used. There is concern that the failure to achieve capacity at Beccles Quay has less to do with demand and is, instead, partly attributable to the poor condition of the moorings as a consequence of historic under-investment. These comments echo those of Beccles Town Council.
- 6.9 Beccles is a key gateway town to the southern Broads, and Beccles Town Council has expressed concern that the reduction in numbers of casual mooring spaces would have a negative impact on the town.
- 6.10 It is acknowledged that the quay heading and mooring infrastructure at Beccles quay is, in places, in poor condition and this will deter some users from mooring at the quay. However, the numbers provided do not suggest that this is the only reason for the significant underuse of the visitor moorings. Similarly, whilst the Broad Authority moorings elsewhere in Beccles may be popular, this will be partly because there is no charge made for their use, as opposed to charges of between £2.50 and £11.75 at Beccles, dependant on size of boat and length of stay.
- 6.11 Policies in the development plan and the mooring strategy offer strong protection to existing moorings, particularly for those in casual visitor use, in recognition of their important role in supporting the tourist economy. However, private boats also contribute to the local and boat-related economy, and the Authority is mindful of a continuing demand for private moorings in the Broads. On this basis, conversion of underused visitor moorings to private moorings where there

is demand is not considered to undermine the objectives of the policies or prejudice the enjoyment of the water. Consequently, it is considered that the proposal would not conflict with Core Strategy Policies CS9 or CS14.

- 6.12 Given that the data submitted demonstrates significant underuse of the exiting casual moorings, it is considered that a modest reduction to address this over-capacity would not impact on visitor numbers to the town, and so could not be considered to have a detrimental impact on the town. Accordingly, the proposal does not conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS10.
- 6.13 It must be noted however, that there is concern that the poor quality of some areas of Beccles Quay may have the effect of deterring potential visitors from using the visitor moorings, and it is unclear from the figures provided how significant this deterrent effect may be. Whilst it is acceptable to alter the balance of private and casual moorings in Beccles quay to address a genuine issue of over capacity in provision of casual moorings, it would not be in accordance with policy, nor the Broads Authority's wider objectives, to allow the quay to be operated in such a way that deters visitors from mooring and results in artificially low usage of the visitor moorings.
- 6.14 Consequently, it is considered prudent to permit this change of use for a trial period of two years. If, in this time, casual mooring use at Beccles Quay remains low, whilst at the same time numbers of hire boats on the Broads continue to increase (as is anticipated) and neighbouring Broads Authority Moorings on the Waveney report high levels of usage, the Authority will consider this to be indicative of the poor quality infrastructure at Beccles Quay suppressing demand, rather than a naturally low demand for visitor moorings at this site. This being the case, the Authority would be minded not to permit a renewal of temporary change of use, or the granting of a permanent change of use for these 15 moorings. In the meantime, the Authority will enter into discussions with Waveney District Council with a view to seeking to improve the existing facilities.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 This is a strategically important site that contributes significantly to the provision of tourist infrastructure in the southern Broads area, and any proposal to reduce numbers of casual moorings must be carefully considered.
- 7.2 In this instance the applicant has demonstrated that the existing casual moorings are underused and that the loss of 15 casual moorings would address an issue of over capacity, whilst still allowing room for growth in mooring numbers on all but the busiest one or two days of the season.
- 7.3 There are concerns regarding the poor condition of some areas of moorings at Beccles Quay and the effect this may have on deterring potential users thus keeping usage of the casual moorings artificially low. Consequently, whilst it is considered that the numbers supplied indicating a low level use suggest there would be no adverse effect to the tourist network as a result of this change of use, it is sensible to take a cautious approach and permit the change of use for a

trial period of two years in order to allow for the collection of further information regarding the demand for visitor moorings in this area.

8 Recommendation

Approve subject to the following conditions:

- In accordance with the approved plans
- No residential use of moorings
- For a temporary period of two years

9 Reason for Recommendation

The proposal would allow for better use of an existing facility and would not have a detrimental effect on the tourist network in the Southern Broads area or the town of Beccles. The proposal does not conflict with saved Policy C12 of the Broads Local Plan (1997) or policies CS9, CS10 and CS14 of the adopted Core Strategy DPD (2007).

Background papers: Application File

Author: Fergus Bootman
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List of Appendices: Site Location Plan

BA/2009/0254/FUL - Beccles Yacht Station, Fen Lane, Beccles
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