

Planning Committee

04 February 2022

Agenda item number 7.2

BA/2021/0472/FUL – Land at How Hill, Ludham: Replacement boardwalk

Report by Senior Planning Officer

Proposal

Replacement of wooden boardwalk with recycled plastic and replacement of arched wooden bridge with horizontal wooden alternative.

Applicant

Broads Authority

Recommendation

Approve

Reason for referral to committee

The Broads Authority is the applicant.

Application target date

25 January 2022

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1. Description of site and proposal

- 1.1. The How Hill site is located in the north of the Broads, in the valley of the River Ant between the villages of Irstead to the north and Ludham to the south. The site forms a nature reserve within which is How Hill House, a Grade II listed building used as an education centre.
- 1.2. The location of this application site is to the east of the main How Hill site, adjacent to Crome’s Broad. The nature trail here is open annually from Easter to the end of October and provides access to the National Nature Reserve for the general public. Part of the trail that runs along the edge of and through a section of wet woodland is surfaced with a wooden boardwalk which is connected across an open water dyke by an arched, wooden bridge. The proposal seeks to replace the existing bridge and boardwalk.
- 1.3. The design of the replacement boardwalk will be almost identical to the existing except for the change of materials to recycled plastic. Dimensions of the walkway will be the same (1.3m wide), with an additional runner along the edges which will provide an extra safety measure, giving a more visible edge to the boardwalk. The sleepers may need to be slightly closer together for added strength but this will not result in a noticeable change.
- 1.4. The current arched bridge will be dismantled and replaced with a flat wooden structure. The change in shape is to allow better access for disabled visitors. The bridge will be supported by wooden piles at each end, with four horizontal bearers spanning the 8m dyke. These will be covered by wooden planks and bounded on each side with wooden handrails, planed to a smooth finish. If needed, non-slip strips will be added to the edge of the wooden planks.

2. Site history

- 2.1. None specific here.

3. Consultations received

BA Historic Environment Manager

- 3.1. Following the pre-application discussions I am satisfied that this proposal to replace the timber boardwalk with a recycled plastic will have a very limited impact on the sensitive

character and appearance of this area and I do not therefore object. However, this is subject to the exact type, colour and finish of the boarding so please can this be conditioned and samples provided.

The design of the existing bridge is quite distinctive. However, this is a relatively recent structure, designed to allow boat access beneath it and its design clearly limits access over it. I therefore have no objection to its replacement with a simple timber bridge structure which will provide safer and better access into the reserve.

BA Landscape

- 3.2. The proposals are essentially a like-for-like replacement of existing features and would not cause any significant landscape or visual effects.

4. Representations

- 4.1. None received.

5. Policies

- 5.1. The adopted development plan policies for the area are set out in the [Local Plan for the Broads](#) (adopted 2019).
- 5.2. The following policies were used in the determination of the application:
 - DM11 - Heritage Assets
 - DM13 – Natural Environment
 - DM16 – Development & Landscape
 - DM43 - Design

6. Assessment

- 6.1. The application seeks to replace an existing wooden boardwalk with a recycled plastic material and replace the existing pedestrian bridge with a new, horizontal, accessible version made of timber. The replacements will be on a like-for-like basis in terms of their position on the nature trail.

Principle of development

- 6.2. The nature trail at How Hill is open annually from Easter to the end of October and provides access to the National Nature Reserve for the general public. The Broads Authority has a responsibility to ensure that access to the public is available. Both the bridge and the boardwalk are nearing the end of their serviceable life and are now due for replacement. The principle of the development is therefore acceptable.

Design and Impact upon the landscape

- 6.3. It is proposed to replace the existing wooden boardwalk with a recycled plastic material that has been used elsewhere within the Broads Area.

- 6.4. Considering the principle of replacing a traditional material such as timber with a recycled/composite plastic material, this is typically resisted throughout the Broads due to circumstances relating to a building or a specific character of an area and in this instance, the area is very natural. However, timber does have a limited lifespan and the Broads Authority recognise that the overall quality of plastic/recycled materials has improved in recent years with some of the products achieving a relatively natural finish. There is a need to consider each proposal on a case by case basis and subject to details the change of material may not be unacceptable. It is also recognised that there are benefits of using recycled plastic including its inherent non-slip properties, removing the need for chicken wire or any other type of additional design requirements, along with the fact that the proposed recycled plastic is a dark coloured material and would be replacing an unsightly damaged boardwalk. In addition, with no need for treatment, unlike tanned timber, there is no risk of leaching into the surrounding environment. Subject to a high quality product being used, it is likely that the plastic will, over time, weather to natural finish comparable to timber and as it is located in an enclosed area, there will be no adverse visual impact on the surrounding landscape.
- 6.5. The current bridge is an arched design, originally installed in order to maintain boat access to the dyke spanned by the bridge. Unfortunately, this design does limit access and even with non-slip strips and netting, still presents a steep and potentially off-putting crossing particularly for wheelchair users. The proposal is therefore to replace the bridge with a simpler, flat design similar to that used elsewhere on the How Hill estate. There is no objection from either the Landscape Architect or the Historic Environment Manager to the replacements and the proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of Policies DM11, DM16 and DM43.

Biodiversity

- 6.6. The works will be contained within a limited working corridor, along an existing access route that has regular pedestrian traffic and vegetation management. Although some vegetation clearance will be required in the immediate vicinity of the bridge an initial habitat assessment has identified that this area is unsuitable for water vole burrows and no signs have been found. It is proposed to undertake all three phases of development outside of the bird breeding season and numbers of people working on site will be kept to a small core group. Utilising the access from the adjacent field will minimise impacts and provides the optimal route for minimising tracking, footfall and noise.
- 6.7. Discussions with Natural England suggest that this proposal would not be classified as works to an SSSI that would require separate consent. The proposal is considered to be in accordance with Policy DM13 of the Local Plan for the Broads.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The proposals will allow for better access along the nature trail around How Hill in particular, the new bridge will allow for wheelchair users to also use the trail. The

proposed change in materials is not considered to be unacceptable in terms of the impact on the character of the area. It is therefore recommended that planning permission is approved subject to conditions.

8. Recommendation

8.1. Approve subject to the following conditions:

- Time Limit
- In accordance with the submitted documents and plans.
- Constructed in accordance with the agreed material schedule or requirement to submit details of material if they differ due to supply issues.

9. Reason for recommendation

9.1. Subject to the conditions outlined above, the application is considered to be in accordance with Policies DM11, DM13, DM16 and DM43 of the Local Plan for the Broads 2019.

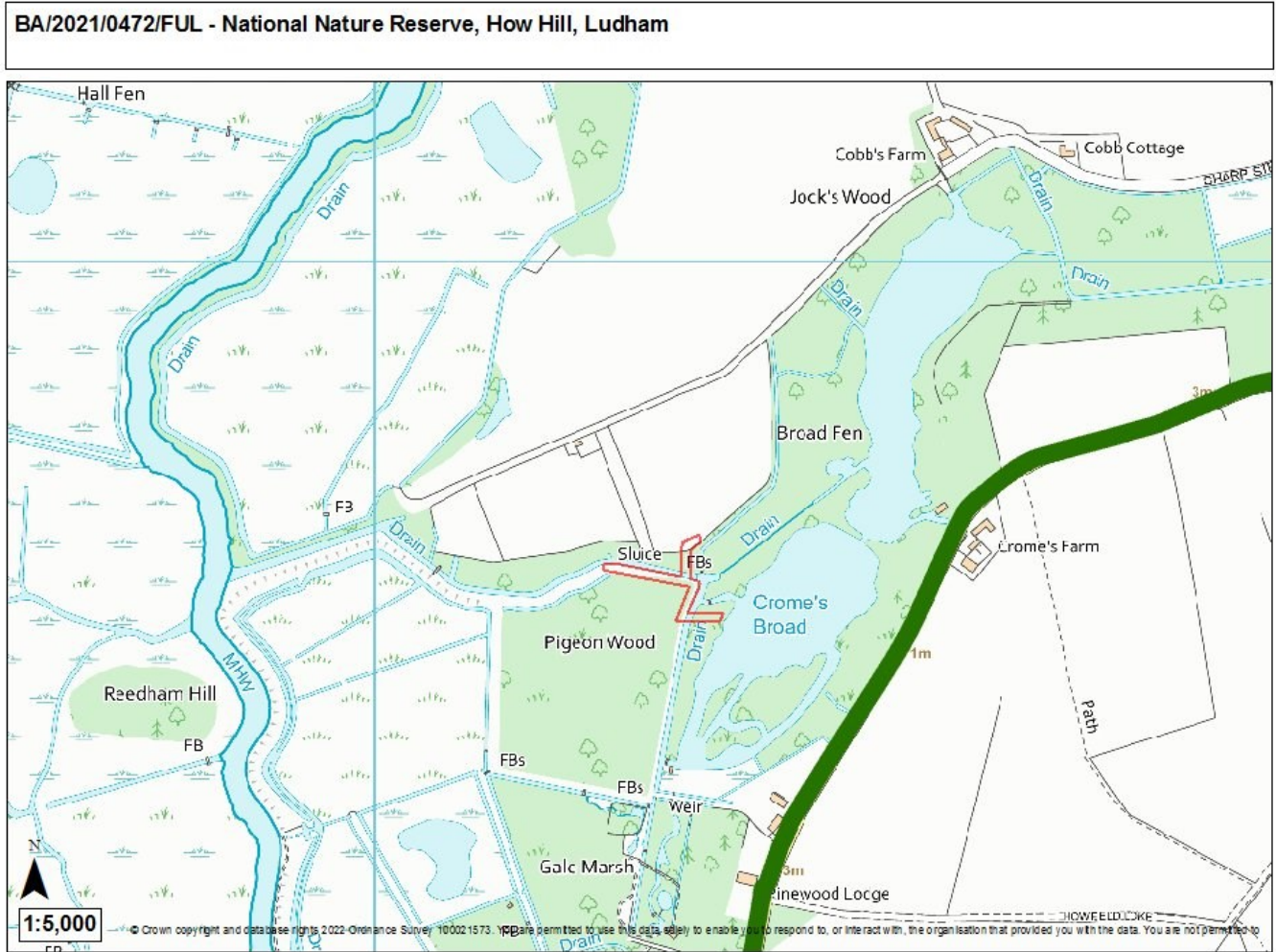
Author: Cheryl Peel

Date of report: 18 January 2022

Background papers: Application file

Appendix 1 – Location map

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