

Development at Whitlingham Country Park
Update

Report by Director of Operations

<p>Summary: This report sets out the steps taken to develop a partnership project at Whitlingham Country Park. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.</p>

1 Background

- 1.1 Members of the Broads Local Access Forum have asked to be kept updated on the possible development at Whitlingham Country Park, and this report aims to provide a briefing on the current position.

2 Proposed Development

- 2.1 Work has been carried out to develop ideas for a proposed partnership project, which seeks to incorporate enhanced visitor centre and public facilities alongside youth hostel accommodation.
- 2.2 A report has been prepared for the Whitlingham Charitable Trust (Appendix 1) which sets out the process so far, and proposes a draft Vision Statement as the initial phase of works completed. Additionally, the next steps of the development work are suggested.
- 2.3 The Whitlingham Charitable Trust is meeting on 12 June to consider this report, and so a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

Background papers: Nil

Author: Trudi Wakelin
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Appendices: APPENDIX 1 – Whitlingham Development Draft Vision Statement

Appendix 1

Whitlingham Development

Draft Vision Statement

'A Lifelong journey of discovery'

The Whitlingham Park - Broads Gateway development will lead the region in promoting year round access to high quality and exciting outdoor opportunities which promote discovery and personal development through:

Inspire

- Inspiring users to discover and experience the natural, cultural and landscape heritage environment (the heritage) of the Broads
- Promote enjoyment and understanding of the Broads experience through events and self guided activities better interpreting and explaining
- Improve the condition and management of the wildlife spectacle and cultural and landscape environment at the hub to create more opportunity for up close and memorable experiences inspiring a desire to discover more in the wider Broads
- Harbour a Deeper understanding -of the heritage of the Broads through 'layered' experiences of the hub – 'read, see, do' and learn, with "a sense of place" mirroring the wider broads experience
- Motivate return visits
- Encourage changed behaviours through varied messages – care for the environment, promote sustainability in daily life, opportunities for further exploration of the Broads nurturing a sense of shared responsibility for the management and protection of the environment and heritage of the Broads etc
- Building community links with regular visitors
- Create an accommodation base inclusive to all visitors at the hub and provide sustainable access from the Park to the wider Broads by water and cycle, to encourage informed and enhanced exploration of this unique landscape.

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Through

Play

- Informal recreation/ play space
- Interactive, interpretative, adventure and nature play
- Sport/ activities – casual and organised
- Provide opportunities for real as well as virtual experience
- Building confidence and ability to experience activity in the wider Broads
- Experience the rich natural cultural and landscape heritage of the Broads

Learn

- Broads Interpretation – visitor centre, exhibitions then experience
- Outdoor adventure
- Environmental education – Forest Schools
- Learning outside the classroom
- Appreciate past human management, exploitation and the continued evolution of the Broads natural, landscape and cultural history heritage
- Skills contributing to continuing management

Contribute

- ❖ Opportunities for more and wider involvement in management and improvement of the Broads heritage
- ❖ Develop opportunities for volunteering in the Park and wider Broads with the partners
- ❖ Promote the support and facilitation of volunteer leaders to set up Community volunteer schemes in their own communities
- ❖ Best practice training hub for volunteers and other stakeholders, to share resources and develop a centre of excellence
- ❖ Contribute to the economic and wider sustainability of existing uses and facilities on the site by creating an inclusive accommodation base within the hub
- ❖ A place for everyone

As a local hub, this will incorporate established uses of the Park by communities and user groups, but by developing the site as a Gateway to the Broads it will allow orientation to and signposting of the Broads, provide a greater level of external focus and the incorporation of accommodation on site will provide a bigger reach for attracting new audiences from within and outside of the region and provide a unique opportunity for experiencing the Park. This will be facilitated and supported by the development of 80 bed youth hostel accommodation (and possible alternative accommodation options) offering activity packages, and a flexible learning space alongside an improved visitor centre and public facilities. The local economy will also benefit from the increased exploration and consequent visitor spend in the Broads.

The Park environment will be enhanced to showcase Broads' habitats and species, cultural and landscape heritage to provide greater opportunity for up close experiences with wildlife/nature/heritage and maintained to a high standard, and Providing an opportunity to experience activities relating to the Broads environment will help to inspire visitors to explore the wider Broads, better appreciate them and contribute to their maintenance.

It is the aim of the partnership to ensure that all visitors to the park receive an inspiring and enriching experience, and to use the site for orientation to and as a springboard from which to dive into the Broads. To support the integration of uses in the Park, it is proposed that from a central focal point a zoning approach is adopted and incorporated into the Master Plan for the site, which will identify an intensity gradient in the Park showing areas of busy, quiet, remote or wild characters. Moving around the Park will be supported by way markers, encouraging access away from the honey pot but also maintaining a sense of discovery in the hidden areas off the beaten track.

The project represents an opportunity to provide inclusive for all accommodation within the Whitlingham hub. The wide range of activities currently available at Whitlingham and the potential of the hub in terms offering a visitor experience in addition to visitor information in a sustainable and easily accessible location give rise to a unique opportunity. It is an opportunity, through experience, to be inspired by, play with, learn about and contribute to the special qualities of the Broads.

Principles

Partners agree that the development should adopt the following principles in regard to the design and operation of the proposed development;

- i. Promotes a vision which not only promotes the aims of the partners but also benefits the wider local economy and community and fulfils the full potential of the existing site and wider broads
- ii. Environmentally responsible, high quality design and construction, and customer service standards
- iii. Provide a sense of arrival and orientation for the Park and all the possibilities it offer
- iv. To incorporate the Flint Barn into the development to ensure a viable use is maintained
- v. Promotes learning in innovative and exciting ways so that the fabric of the development encourages and supports learning opportunities
- vi. Accessible and inclusive to all, providing equality of opportunity
- vii. Promotes wellbeing and health and facilitating “quiet enjoyment” through zoned development and use of the Park
- viii. Promotes sustainability in building design and capacity of use of the park
- ix. Improves, interprets and gives an experience~~Makes the most~~ of the natural, cultural and landscape heritage features of the Park and through this helps promote and enhance the ~~wider surrounding~~Broads-landscape environment and visitor experience
- x. Promotes and strengthens the economic viability of the existing service providers through cooperation and collaboration between the partners, and clusters the main hub together to enable sharing and more efficient use of existing resources
- xi. Secondary activities such as conference uses will be encouraged where this is required to support the economic viability of the park, as well as an opportunity to reach another audience