

Heritage Asset Review Group

Notes of the meeting held on 18 December 2020

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Present

Chair - Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro, Stephen Bolt, Bill Dickson, Lana Hempsall, Tim Jickells, Bruce Keith.

In attendance

Kayleigh Judson – Heritage Planning Officer, Kate Knights – Historic Environment Manager, Cally Smith – Head of Planning and Sara Utting - Governance Officer

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies received from Harry Blathwayt.

2. Declarations of interest and introductions

No further declarations of interest were made in addition to those already registered.

3. Notes of HARG meeting held on 09 October 2020

The notes of the meeting held on 9 October 2020 were received. These had been submitted to the Planning Committee on 6 November 2020.

4. Points of information arising from the minutes

There were no points of information arising from the previous minutes other than those on the agenda.

The Historic Environment Manager and the Heritage Planning Officer presented a joint report for information for items 5-9.

5. Conservation area reviews

The Authority had a statutory duty to review its Conservation Areas and, following discussions with neighbouring authorities, the programme had been amended slightly since the beginning of the year. Attention would be focussed on those older Conservation Area Appraisals most in need of review, as follows: Belaugh; Halvergate & Tunstall and Coltishall, with the latter being a high priority as it was a considerable number of years since the last review. Broadland District Council was likely to lead on Coltishall, with the BA assisting. It was anticipated Neatishead and Somerleyton would also be added to the list.

North Norfolk District Council had adopted both Ludham and Stalham appraisals on 7 December 2020.

6. Listing application – The Nebb, Blundeston

This building had now been officially listed by Historic England on 8 December 2020, for its special architectural or historic interest. Its assessment suggested that the earliest part of the building dated from the first half of the 16th century and there was documentary evidence of the building dating from a map of 1614. In the 18th century, the building had been extended to either end and the main front and rear elevations largely reconstructed. By the mid-19th century, the building had been divided into two dwellings and a small extension added to the north elevation and it was subsequently returned to a single dwelling in 1960. Although a number of alterations had been made, the building continued to tell the story of its long and interesting history.

The Heritage Planning Officer advised that she had contacted the estate agent to make them aware of the listing and, in addition, she would be meeting a potential buyer later that day to discuss what the listing meant and also any potential work they wished to carry out to the property.

7. The future of the Broads' Mills

The Broads Authority area was characterised by its mills, with 31 on the Halvergate Marshes alone. The majority dated from the 19th century with many of them either listed or locally

listed but it was never the intention for them to have such a long life, hence they were now redundant in terms of their original use.

The mills were of great importance to the Broads, acting as landmarks within the landscape, and telling us much about how the Broads historically functioned. Halvergate Marshes was also designated as a Conservation Area, although it was considered 'at risk' by Historic England, partly due to the poor condition of the numerous mill structures within it.

Although the structures had the appearance of a conventional windmill and worked in a similar manner, the purpose of the mills was to drain the low-lying land of the Broads. They were positioned adjacent to rivers and had a scoop wheel to lift water from the land into the rivers.

Few, if any, of the drainage mills retained their original function of draining the land, with a number of the mills being converted for residential use (for example, Dilham Dyke and Clippesby), whilst others were open to the public (for example, Berney Arms, Thurne and Stracey). Other mills were in a poor condition but still valued as ruins with the landscape, as well as for their historic significance. The Norfolk Windmills Trust managed 21 mills across the county, 13 of which they owned or leased. However, the others were privately owned.

The mills had little intrinsic financial value but were costly to maintain and there were a number of common issues:

- A backlog of repairs: many of the mills were in a very poor condition and had lost many of their original elements (eg boat-shaped caps and sails)
- Subsidence: the mills were only built to last 30-50 years. They were built on inherently unstable ground which resulted in structural issues being commonplace. Underpinning was often required but was very costly.
- Varying degree of retention of the original machinery.
- Isolated locations with difficult access: inevitably located on the banks of a river, frequently only accessible via the river or tracks across extensive marshland where cattle were grazed, the mills were hard to access which made the logistics and costs of repairing the mills, getting visitors to the mill or finding new uses for the mills challenging.
- Lack of millwrighting skills resulted in high costs and limited availability of services.
- The cost of scaffolding could be prohibitive.
- The cost of insuring empty listed buildings was very high.

Consequently, many private building owners were unwilling or unable to ensure that the buildings were maintained and the restoration of the mills was frequently cost-prohibitive. The Authority tried to encourage mill owners, by working in a proactive manner with building owners and other organisations, especially where mills were on the Buildings at Risk register. The Heritage team offered free advice and guidance to building owners on repairs and free

pre-application advice on planning matters. Should a listed mill be in a very poor condition, it would be possible for the Broads Authority to serve a Repairs Notice or Urgent Works Notice through its enforcement powers. However, this would be a last resort measure and officers would always try to negotiate with the owner first.

Occasionally, mills were converted to residential or holiday accommodation, although the drainage mills were not particularly suited to this use. However, especially if the mill was listed, this would only be possible where the conversion would not be considered to be detrimental to the character and appearance of the building and also its significance as a mill. If the mill retained all of its internal machinery, this may not be considered appropriate. There were also other issues such as vehicular access and the impact on the wider landscape setting of domestic paraphernalia.

A study carried out in 2005 examined the possibility of using the mills to generate electricity. However, it established that a mill could never be as efficient as a purpose-built modern wind-turbine, there were high costs associated with power cables and stabilising the mills and it would frequently result in disconnecting or removing elements of the original machinery which would not be encouraged. As a result, this had never been pursued.

A number of the mills were open to the public; for example, Thurne as part of the Wind Energy Museum and Horsey which belonged to the National Trust. However, this was not an option for every mill. We would not want to 'dilute' the attraction of those already open and again there were other considerations such as access, manning the site, insurance etc. However, walking trails that passed 'closed' mills with interpretation outside them was something that the Authority was seeking to improve through the Water, Mills and Marshes project.

Many mills now had value as derelict structures in the landscape and the value of these structures should not be under-estimated, both aesthetically, historically and ecologically ("managed decay"). Physically they could be consolidated, so that they did not deteriorate further.

Over a number of years, the Authority been successful in bidding for external grant funding from organisations such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with whom it was running the current Water Mills and Marshes project. Such schemes enabled capacity building (eg heritage skills) in the local workforce, supported local businesses and to carry out programmes of repair and restoration on frequently privately-owned mills where otherwise the buildings' condition would deteriorate. The grants provided important financial stimulus, often with in-kind contributions from building owners.

Programmes like the Water Mills and Marshes scheme also delivered wider benefits such as improving access routes to the mills and across the marshes, promoting the mills and educating the wider community about the buildings and the history and natural environment in their local area.

The Windmills Trust was set up in 1963 by Norfolk County Council for the preservation of windmills, watermills and drainage mills. The Trust cared for 21 buildings across the county

and has been successful at obtaining funding for bigger projects, such as the current project at Stracey Arms Mill and Old Buckenham Mill. However, their annual grant did little more than cover the fixed costs of the mills in their portfolio, for example insurance (which was very expensive), regular machinery lubrication, fire extinguishers, account audits and grounds maintenance. Unfortunately, this has meant there was now something of a maintenance backlog. The Trust was currently undertaking a governance review and was investigating different ways of fundraising. Although the Authority did work with them on a regular basis, the BA's relationship with the Trust was not as formal as it once was (eg we no longer had any Trustees on the board) and this was something the Authority was hoping to strengthen, as the vast majority of their mills were in the Broads Authority area.

In particular, the Authority was working with the Windmills Trust on various aspects of the Water, Mills and Marshes project and were developing ways in which they may be able to carry forward some of the 'legacy items' from this project. These included an improved website, a database that could be publicly accessible for mills-based information, developing a 'Mills Warden' scheme and continuing the Authority's work with City College Norwich, which may aid with some of the Trusts' maintenance issues whilst providing invaluable experience for students.

In conclusion, unfortunately there was no simple solution. Each mill needed to be considered on its own merits, in terms of its historic and architectural significance, its ownership and its geographical location. The Authority would continue to work with building owners to encourage repair and maintenance, but must recognise the constraints that they faced. It was likely that externally funded projects would continue to play a part in repairing and restoring the most significant of the mills, as well as improving interpretation, access and education about the structures so that they were more widely appreciated – all very important in ensuring their long-term survival. Likewise, introducing young people to the heritage skills required to maintain the buildings would continue to be of the upmost importance.

Officers would continue to work with, and develop closer relationships with, organisations such as The Windmills Trust and Historic England. However, it was likely that 'managed decay' would continue to be the option for some of the mills.

The Chair thanked the Historic Environment Manager for her very valuable report and presentation.

A member commented that it was important to strengthen the relationship between the Authority and the Watermills Trust. In addition, he added that whilst the concept of "managed decay" might be difficult to accept, in some cases it might be the only option. He referred to the possibility of adapting some of the mills for use as holiday rental properties and whether this would encourage owners to invest, particularly if some of the requirements were relaxed. Another member agreed that this could be the most commercially viable option in the longer term but would require considerable capital outlay. He also suggested consideration be given to utilising the tallest structures for hosting wi-fi masts/antenna. The Historic Environment Manager considered this to be something worth investigating, drawing similarities to the Wispire initiative which used church towers in a non-visually obtrusive way.

8. Grove House and Farm, Irstead

The Heritage Planning Officer presented this item as an example of the type of applications officers dealt with on a day to day basis. A number of applications had been submitted for this site and officers continued to have pre-application discussions.

Grove House was a Grade II Listed Georgian farmhouse and the site also contained an outbuilding (formerly a stable), with the immediate neighbouring site comprising a large thatched barn (Grade II listed) and a very large, modern agricultural unit. The house was of red brick construction under a black glazed pantile roof with a typical Georgian façade such as sash windows, central doorcase and surround, central ridge stack and beautiful projecting modillion eaves cornice. Photographs were shown which evidenced that the farm was originally one unit and a sweeping drive had existed until fairly recently.

The site had been purchased towards the end of 2019 and after pre-application discussions, applications came in for its repair, conservation and reinstatement of the swooping drive. The Highways Authority had a number of concerns regarding re-installing the historic drive (due to lack of visibility and lack of control over how drivers would use the drive to enter one way and exit the other). Following negotiations, it was agreed to realign the access points, remove the existing boundary hedge (Rhododendron) and replant further back with a mixed native hedge. In addition, the proposals also included a small turning area in front of the house which satisfied the Highway Authority's concerns.

Another area of contention was a rear fire place which existed on the back of the main house within a later extension. The stack to the fireplace had been previously removed following consent in 1991. The heritage statement showed that it was fairly old but not original as the bricks sat separately and not tied into the rear wall. Given it was also unusable, on balance, its removal was considered acceptable. Following its removal, a historic windows opening was actually found which had not been infilled correctly and accordingly, was damaging the brick wall behind with large cracking. Fortunately, the removal of the stack enabled the rectification of this damage.

Another point of interest was the fireplace in the front room which was found to consist of Minton & Co tiles; a company which famously produced porcelain pottery but also very characteristic Victorian floor tiles.

Turning to the rear of the house, which was probably the most historic part, the application involved the installation of underfloor heating. There was a modern raised floor step which was lifted and revealed sections of the original historic floor intact underneath. Consequently, each pavement tile was lifted, numbered and relaid in exactly the same position following the installation of the heating, without any evidence of the work taking place. A number of brick arches were also discovered and it was decided to retain these as interesting features.

The west wall of the main room was suffering from severe damp. It had a mix of inappropriate materials which had been installed such as foam and cement to try and rectify the damp issues but unsurprisingly this had made the damp worse, evident by the green tinge

to the bricks on the photographs. As the wall was west-facing, it was unexpected to see so much damp but investigations revealed the guttering was mis-aligned at the top near the cornice. Furthermore, following some digging, the remains of a large tree had been discovered and this tree had more than likely overshadowed that side of the wall for many years and it had been covered in Ivy. The situation had now been rectified by allowing the damp to dry out and the use of more appropriate breathable lime plasters.

The front façade of the dwelling included some very interesting mortar detail comprising white lime mortar behind, then a red mortar and what appeared to be a very thin lime mortar line on top of that, a process known as “tuck-pointing”. This was used to mimic a very highly skilled and costly process of gauged brickwork evident on many Victorian buildings in cities, such as train stations and museums etc. Both the Georgians and Victorians loved this detail as the very thin and precise mortar enabled them to show off their wealth.

Finally, at the rear of the property was a little dairy/pantry which was considered to be a particularly interesting room and would help to read the history of the house and the development of the farm. It was pleasing to note that the owners wanted to retain this room as it would have been.

Historically, the site was connected to a larger farm site containing a Grade II Listed thatched barn, which sat immediately adjacent to Grove House and attached to the historic stable. The wider farm site had been split and demarcated from the farmhouse and consequently the relationship between the farmhouse and setting of the thatched barn had been significantly damaged. Pre-application discussions had also taken place regarding bringing the site back into one and the appropriate repair, conservation and adaption of the thatched barn and landscape improvements of the site.

A member questioned if the owner was using one particular contractor for the renovations as this required particular skills and knowledge. The Heritage Planning Officer responded that there were a number of factors involved – the new owners had previous experience of converting an old Listed Building; a local contractor had been engaged for this current property who had close association with the history of the farm. Therefore, he was familiar with the house and finally, the agent specialised in historic buildings.

In conclusion, it was noted that officers were monitoring progress at the house and it was hoped to bring some photographs of the completed works to HARG in due course.

9. Water Mills and Marshes – heritage skills and Land of the Windmills and update

It was noted that students were now going back out on site, with brickwork students at Six Mile House Mill and decorating students at Strumpshaw Engine House carrying out the internal lime-washing and they would also soon be moving to Six Mile House to carry out the re-tarring of the mill (using a tar substitute as the use of coal tar had been banned since October 2020). There were also students working in the workshop on joinery items including various bird and bat boxes, the windows for Oby mill and the sails for Muttons Mill.

Work was continuing at Six Mile House Mill with repairs to the brickwork and the drainage channel. The cap was now on and should receive its covering this week. The coal tar substitute should be arriving very shortly and decorating could then commence, following which the scaffolding could be removed.

The final pieces of work were being carried out at Strumpshaw Engine House.

10. Local Listing project

In the middle of October, the Government had announced a pot of funding for county-led pilot projects to encourage Local Planning Authorities to develop their Local Lists. Working with a number of Norfolk local authorities, a bid had been developed and submitted. An announcement on successful bids was expected by the end of November but to date, no announcement had been received.

The funding would enable the Authority to consolidate its adopted Local List with other identified buildings; develop an improved public interface for the list, establish a county-wide criteria for local listing to ensure consistency and hopefully to extend the list.

11. Any other business

A member commended the idea to hold HARG meetings separately from the Planning Committee.

A question was asked what software was used to identify when something such as a post box would be affected by a planning application, referring to his recent awareness that 60% of Local Planning Authorities used Idox. The Head of Planning responded that the Authority used a geographically based system which linked maps to the database, enabling information to be linked and constraints and features to be identified. The relevant map (or layer) would identify a post box so, if a post box was potentially to be affected, the Post Box Protection Society could be notified, however this would rely on the Authority having the relevant layer. The Authority would continue to purchase new layers within the software as they became available.

A new member to the group commented that he found the meeting very interesting and looked forward to attending site visits, once appropriate, to visit the buildings discussed.

The Chair concluded the meeting by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and happy new year for 2021.

12. Date of next meeting

The next HARG meeting would be held on **Friday 12 March 2021 at 10am**.

The meeting ended at 11.15am

Signed by

Chairman