

# Planning Committee

05 March 2021

Agenda item number 8.1

## BA 2021 0028 FUL Whitlingham Country Park

### Construction of toilet block

Report by Planning Officer

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#### Proposal

Replace temporary toilet facility

#### Applicant

The Whitlingham Charitable Trust

#### Recommendation

Approve subject to conditions

#### Reason for referral to committee

Broads Authority's Chief Executive is a Board Member of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust

#### Application target date

26.03.2021

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## Contents

|    |                                   |   |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Description of site and proposals | 2 |
| 2. | Site history                      | 2 |
| 3. | Consultations received            | 2 |
| 4. | Representations                   | 3 |
| 5. | Policies                          | 3 |
| 6. | Assessment                        | 3 |
| 7. | Conclusion                        | 5 |
| 8. | Recommendation                    | 6 |
| 9. | Reason for recommendation         | 6 |
|    | Appendix 1 – Location map         | 7 |

# 1. Description of site and proposals

- 1.1. The application site is within the car park area of the Whitlingham Country Park to the east of the café and visitor centre, to the south of Whitlingham Great Broad and to the north of the entrance to Whitlingham Broad Campsite. By road the site is accessed from Whitlingham Lane to the car parks which surround the application site and the edge of the Broad. The site is accessed by the National Cycle Network route 1 which links to Norwich to the north west and Loddon to the south east. By foot there are extensive footpath routes to the site from Norwich, Postwick and local areas.
- 1.2. Currently on site is a temporary building which has functioned as public toilets since temporary planning permission was granted in 2014 (ref. BA/2014/0204/FUL) for a period of three years. This was subsequently extended by permission for a further 3 years (ref. BA/2018/0177/FUL). The existing building measures 8.5m x 3m with a flat roof with a maximum height of 2.5m. Attached to the north elevation is a timber access ramp which measures the full length of the building and is approximately 1.3m wide.
- 1.3. Planning permission is sought for the replacement of this temporary public toilet block with a permanent building. The building is proposed to be of timber frame construction with a pitched roof covered in clay pan tiles with feather edged timber cladding and a access ramp located on the north elevation.
- 1.4. The building would be located in the same position as the current structure, but is proposed to be slightly larger at 8.8m long by 4.5m wide. The access ramp would be covered by the roof which would oversail giving some shelter for this area. The roof, as proposed, would be taller than the current roof with a ridge height of 3.93m. The eaves from ground level would be 2.5m which is approximately the same height as the highest point of the existing building's flat roof.
- 1.5. The layout of the public toilets would provide separate male and female toilet blocks (3 WC cubicle in the female block, and 2 WC cubicle male block) and a separate wheelchair accessible unisex WC. This room is shown as being 2.0m by 1.5m. Separately and accessed from the east side elevation is a small plant/services room.
- 1.6. The current design shows an access ramp is 1.1m wide, 3.5m long, at a grade of 1 in 10.

# 2. Site history

- 2.1. Whilst there is extensive planning history for the Whitlingham Country Park site, the most relevant planning permissions are BA/2014/0204/FUL and BA/2018/0177/FUL which are temporary planning permissions and the latter of the two is about to expire. This has resulted in this application being submitted for a permanent replacement.

# 3. Consultations received

## Parish Council

- 3.1. No objection

#### District Member

- 3.2. District Member- This application can be treated as a delegated decision.

#### South Norfolk Council Community Protection and Environmental Quality team

- 3.3. Having considered the application documentation along with the nature and location of this proposal, we have no comments to make regarding this application.

#### Norfolk County Council (NCC) Highways

- 3.4. No objection

#### Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Services

- 3.5. No objection

#### Broads Authority Ecology

- 3.6. No objection subject to 2 conditions to ensure the protection of bats and potential nesting birds.

#### BA Historic Environment Manager

- 3.7. No objection

## 4. Representations

#### Broads Society

- 4.1. Support the application

## 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:

- DM2 - Water Quality and Foul Drainage
- DM4 - Water Efficiency
- DM6 - Surface water run-off
- DM11 - Heritage Assets
- DM16 - Development and Landscape
- DM43 - Design
- DM44 - Vis. and Com. Facilities and Services
- WHI1 – Whitlingham Country Park

## 6. Assessment

- 6.1. The key consideration is the principle of development, design and appearance of the building and any impact upon the landscape and historic buildings, and accessibility of the replacement building. Other issues will also be covered by this report.

### **Principle of development**

- 6.2. There has been a public toilet building here since 2014, prior to which the only toilets on the site were in the flint barn which is used as a visitor centre. There is a identified need to maintain this provision, which is supported in principle by policy DM44 parts c), d), e) and f) of the Local Plan for the Broads. The previous temporary planning permissions have accepted the need for a public toilet facility, but have not allowed the permanent retention of the existing pre-fabricated building as it does not contribute positively to the character or appearance of the area.
- 6.3. The construction of a more suitable building as a permanent replacement is supported in principle as the proposal meets criteria of Policy WH11 of the Local Plan for the Broads. The Highways Authority has not objected to this application or previous schemes, and whilst the current area was formerly car parking, the use of this area for public conveniences is justified as it is a limited area and the displacement of parking can be accommodated within the numerous car parks elsewhere on site. It is not a facility which would give rise to additional vehicular traffic, and does not have a detrimental impact upon the quiet enjoyment of the area.

### **Design**

- 6.4. The park is located to the south-east of Norwich and is located within the Broads Authority area, an area of equivalent status of a National Park. Both National and Local Planning Policies, including WH11 a) and DM43 d) and e) of the Local Plan for the Broads, are clear in outlining that proposals should help protect the special qualities of the area and any new development should be of a high standard and quality of design. The current temporary toilet block and the proposed permanent replacement in the same location are in relatively close proximity to the historic barn which is used as a visitor centre. The barn is considered a locally identified heritage asset and the toilet block is also within the wider setting of the grade II listed remains of Trowse Newton Hall.
- 6.5. The proposal is for a timber-framed structure, with timber cladding and a pantile roof. This is considered to be a significant improvement on the design and appearance of the current facilities and will serve to enhance the character and appearance of the area as well as providing improved facilities for the visitors to the park.
- 6.6. The separation to the flint barn and the screening by the hedge and location within the car parking area result in this proposal having an acceptable impact upon the landscape, and setting of the heritage assets. On this basis the proposal is considered acceptable when considered against Policy DM43, DM16 and WH11 of the Local Plan for the Broads.

### **Accessibility**

- 6.7. The current proposal has a similar footprint and layout to the temporary building. Whilst this has been functional as a temporary facility, it does not meet current building regulations requirements. The new building would be permanent and therefore the facilities would need to comply with the most up to date Building Regulations. These

regulations are often sensible guides as how to best layout a space for a particular function.

- 6.8. The current proposal has followed the floor plan of the existing building, including a wheelchair access ramp, level access and an individual disabled WC. However, there may be a requirement to make changes to the layout to meet current regulations and this is still under discussion. If the Building Regulations cannot be met by the current design, or the facilities could be slightly improved through minor changes such as having a shallower access ramp, larger wheelchair accessible WC or other adaptations, it will be necessary to make amendments to the scheme. Members will be updated verbally at the meeting.

### Other issues

- 6.9. The site is located in the Environment Agency's specified Flood Zone 1. The development is raised slightly from ground level and the use of the building is considered appropriate in this location. On this basis the proposal is considered to accord with Policy DM5 of the Local Plan for the Broads.
- 6.10. The site is an important habitat for bats and birds and therefore two conditions have been proposed by the Authority's ecologist to protect these species during the construction phase. However, considering the nature of this part of the site, the current building on site and the proposed construction, there are no identified adverse impacts related to this development, and any minor impacts would be controlled and mitigated through conditions relating to bird checks if construction takes place during the nesting/breeding season for birds, and an alternative roof underfelt is used which does not harm bats should they use the roof space for roosting.
- 6.11. During the construction phase, access should be maintained to Whitlingham Lane and a safe working area maintained excluding visitors from the construction site. Temporary provision for the toilets may be required if the construction phase is likely to take a protracted time. As such, either during the further negotiations, or through the addition of a condition, further details would need to be submitted and approved prior to works commencing on site to protect members of the public, maintain access and also ensure some public toilet facilities are maintained during the construction period.
- 6.12. Waste from the site is pumped directly to the public sewer which is the preferred option in the NPPF's hierarchy of drainage options and therefore complies with Policy DM2 of the Local Plan for the Broads. Details of water efficiency measures have not been included within the application, however further details would be sought by condition or following further negotiation to ensure that the proposal considers the requirements of meeting Policy DM4 (Water Efficiency) for non-residential buildings.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The proposed replacement of the temporary building with a permanent facility is welcomed and is supported in principle by Policy DM44, DM43 and WHI1 of the Local

Plan for the Broads. Subject to minor amendments to the design or clarification that the current layout is acceptable in terms of accessibility, then the scheme is a good quality and well designed permanent replacement of an important facility. The proposed development would not have any adverse impacts upon the car parking existing on site, the historic buildings and landscape, or local ecology.

## 8. Recommendation

8.1. That the application be approved subject to the conditions listed at 8.2 below. If further amendments are required and have not been received by the date of the meeting, Members are asked to approve the development in principle and to delegate the details to the Head of Planning to approve the application subject to conditions where required, and an amendment to the design and size of the proposed wheelchair accessible WC and access ramp which may include an increase in size of the building if the current scheme would not meet relevant Building Regulations.

### 8.2. Conditions

- Standard time limit and plans conditions
- Sample of exterior materials
- Breeding/nesting bird checks in relevant season
- Variation to roof felt specification to protect bats
- Construction site safety and temporary toilet provision details to be agreed either by condition or submission of additional information prior to determination.
- Biodiversity enhancements where possible in the construction of the building to be agreed either by condition or submission of additional information prior to determination.
- Water efficiency details to be agreed either by condition or submission of additional information prior to determination.

## 9. Reason for recommendation

9.1. The scheme is considered to be in principle acceptable, complies with relevant policy and does not raise any significant material planning considerations apart from the accessibility of the toilets and certain points of detail and these matters are under discussion.

Author: Jack Ibbotson

Date of report: 23 February 2021

Appendix 1 – Location map

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