

Application for Determination

Parish	Ludham		
Reference	BA/2013/0413/FUL	Target date	14/03/2014
Location	St Benet's Abbey, St Benet's Road, Ludham		
Proposal	Proposed erection of three interpretation lecterns, telescope installation, listening bench and car park sign on existing fence		
Applicant	Norfolk Archaeological Trust		
Recommendation	Approve subject to conditions		
Reason referred to Committee	Third Part Objection		

1 Description of Site and Proposals

- 1.1 The application site forms the Scheduled Ancient Monuments associated with St Benet's Abbey, Ludham, on the north bank of the River Bure. The site is within close proximity to the Bure Broads & Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This SSSI forms part of the Broads SAC and Broadland SPA and Ramsar.
- 1.2 St Benet's Abbey was originally founded on an island called Cowholme in 800. The surviving remains are part of the Benedictine foundation that was endowed in 1020 and was combined with the Bishopric of Norwich in 1539. These remains include a 14th century gatehouse encased in an 18th century windmill tower, parts of a precinct wall and ruins of a church. The church was extensively rebuilt in the 14th and 15th century. There are also earthworks of monastic buildings south of the church, an earlier monastic boundary, a series of elaborate fishponds and a range of monastic buildings on the edge of the river. Cropmarks of further buildings at the site are visible on aerial photographs. The site is legally protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments and is of national significance.
- 1.3 The site is now managed by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and is open to the public. The Trust are currently undertaking a scheme to secure the existing remains, improve access and improve interpretation of the site with the help of funding. A small car park exists to the north west of the site. Access to the site can also be achieved via 24 hour public moorings which sit to the immediate south west.

1.4 This proposal is for:

- (i) **The erection of three interpretation lecterns** - 945mm x 700mm, to be mounted on timber legs and to be installed at various locations along the north western boundary of the site. These will hold educational signs.
- (ii) **The installation of a ghost telescope** - Approximately 1.1m tall to be constructed in steel treated in powder coated black paint and to be installed to the south of the site by the bank of the River Bure. Looking through the telescope you will be able to see a ghost of an image of the Abbey situated within the existing site.
- (iii) **The installation of a listening bench** - 1.8m long and 0.79m high to be constructed in un-treated oak with a small listening panel and to be installed within the centre of the site within a dip by the archaeological remains of the church. Manually activated by users of the bench, the audio content on the bench will consist of 6 short clips, three of which will be contemplative prayer and reflections given by the Bishop of Norwich, a clip of plain song from the cathedral choir, plus two short clips on the architecture of the church.
- (iv) **The installation of a car park sign** - A3 size, to be erected on an existing fence and to be installed by the car park area to the north west of the site. This will be a directional sign.

2 Site History

- 2.1 Planning permission was granted in 2007 for the installation of a car park, footpaths, signs, seating and boardwalk (BA/2007/0244/FUL).
- 2.2 An extension in time limit for permission BA/2007/0244/FUL was granted in 2010 (BA/2010/0405/EXT8W).
- 2.3 Amendments were agreed in 2012 for the installation of two culverts to replace two timber bridges over existing drainage dykes (BA/2012/0169/NONMAT).
- 2.4 Amendments were agreed in 2013 for:
 - Change to pedestrian access from 24 hour mooring
 - Change of position of introduction information panel
 - Additional steps to end of flood bank
 - Partial re-alignment of footpaths around gatehouse
 - Additional wooden seat
 - Finish of footpath surface in front of field gate in concrete

- Additional wooden pedestrian gate beside field gate to provide access to monument (BA/2013/0052/NONMAT)

3 Consultation

Broads Society - Support the application but object to the listening bench which includes a speaker. Concerns over noise level and appropriateness of siting the bench within the church area. Audio clips could be provided by smart phone technology. Additional concerns over vandalism of items, given the isolated location.

Parish Council - No objection. However concerns regarding the size of the signs at the river and car park.

District Member - No response.

North Norfolk Planning Department - No response.

English Heritage - No objection to the principle of the proposal and would support the aim to improve interpretation at this nationally important and publicly accessible heritage asset. We can confirm that we have also received a corresponding Scheduled Monument Consent application, and have recommended approval to the Secretary of State. Consent has been granted. An archaeological condition may be appropriate.

Natural England - No objection subject to suitable biodiversity and/or landscaping enhancements being agreed.

Open Spaces Society - No response.

Ancient Monument Society - No response.

Historic Environment Services - No objection subject to the specified conditions covering archaeological investigation of the site.

4 Representation

4.1 None

5 Policies

5.1 The following Policies have been assessed for consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and have been found to be consistent and can therefore be afforded full weight in the consideration and determination of this application:

Core Strategy (2007)
[Core Strategy \(Adopted Sept 2007\).pdf](#)

CS1 - Landscape Protection and Enhancement

CS5 - Historic and Cultural Environments- Key sites
CS6 - Historic and Cultural Environments- Archaeological sites
CS9 - Sustainable Tourism
CS16- Access and Transportation

Development Management Plan DPD (2011)

[DMP DPD - Adoption version.pdf](#)

DP2 - Landscape and Trees
DP4 - Design
DP5 - Historic Environment
DP11 - Access on Land
DP27 - Visitor and Community Facilities and Services
DP29 - Development on Sites with a High Probability of Flooding

- 5.2 The following Policies have been assessed for consistency with the NPPF and have found to lack full consistency with the NPPF and therefore those aspects of the NPPF may need to be given some weight in the consideration and determination of this application:

Development Management Plan DPD (2011)

DP28- Amenity

- 5.3 Material Planning Consideration
National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
[NPPF](#)

6 Assessment

- 6.1 The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are the principle of the development, the impact on landscape and the Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and impact on ecology and the SSSI.

Principle

- 6.2 The development forms part of a scheme which will aid inclusive access and interpretation of an historically important site. In terms of access and interpretation, English Heritage guidance on access to historic buildings and landscapes promotes an inclusive approach to ensure that every visitor to historic sites has a meaningful experience. In order to achieve inclusive interpretation it is advised that a number of interpretation methods are used, this includes visual clear directional signs, visual interpretation, and audio interpretation which reflect the differing needs of a variety of users of a site and encouraging a much broader range of communities to enjoy and participate in the care of historic environment. These objectives are supported and encouraged by the NPPF and the Broads Development Plan Policies on access and interpretation of publically accessible sites generally. By providing a number of interpretation methods at St Benet's Abbey it is considered that the scheme promotes inclusive interpretation of this very important historic site and the development is therefore supported in principle.

Impact on Landscape and the Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- 6.3 The concerns of the Broads Society are acknowledged, this is a very special site and the placing of objects into this landscape needs careful consideration. It is proposed to site the bench outside the church, between the north transept and north wall of the nave. Surveys have identified that visitors would like somewhere to sit once they have walked all the way to the church. The proposed position has been carefully chosen so that the bench is screened from behind a natural dip in this area, is not visible on the main sight-lines from the river or on approach to the church, and is in a relatively sheltered spot for comfort. The bench will be made from untreated oak, the same as the cross, so that it will weather down to a pale grey and will blend into the landscape. It is therefore considered that the bench has been appropriately positioned to ensure no adverse landscape impact.
- 6.4 In terms of the audio clips, it is considered that the clips will enhance the sense of the church as a place of contemplation and prayer. The speaker will be close to the seated person's ear and the volume will be controlled to a low level. The audio will only play when people activate it. In addition, as the site is large in scale, visitors are often dispersed over a large area and it is therefore considered that a conflict in use of the audio bench is unlikely to occur. In terms of the Broads Society comments on smartphone devices as an alternative to the audio bench, more extensive audio guides to the whole site will be downloadable onto smartphones from the website. However, mobile signal is not reliable enough to download on site which is why it is felt that other audio means would be appropriate. It is therefore considered that there would be no adverse impact as a result of the audio transmission from the bench.
- 6.5 The signs are considered of an appropriate size to aid meaningful interpretation but not so large to cause a landscape concern. They are sited by the footpath from the car park, the entrance to the Scheduled Ancient Monument and by the moorings and are therefore considered to be sited at appropriate entrances to the site. The ghost telescope is small in scale and sited appropriately to gain access to views across the site. The telescope is proposed to be powder coated painted black to further reduce its visual impact. The level of interpretation is considered appropriate and is adequately spaced given the scale of the site and there is therefore considered to be no landscape concern.
- 6.6 The application was the subject of extensive pre-application discussion regarding the level and location of interpretation at this site. Officers are satisfied that the applicants have taken on the advice and appropriately designed and sited the proposed interpretation to ensure no adverse impact on the surrounding landscape and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. As advised by English Heritage, it is acknowledged that Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent has been granted for the development by the Secretary of State.

6.7 It is therefore considered that there would be no adverse impact on the landscape and the inclusion of appropriate inclusive interpretation will enhance the experience and understanding of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments for the variety of users which visit the site.

Impact on Ecology and the SSSI

6.8 Given the small scale and nature of the proposals it is not considered that there would be an adverse impact on ecology or the SSSI. It is considered that an appropriate level of biodiversity enhancements should be secured via condition.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The development forms part of a scheme which will aid inclusive access and interpretation of an historically important site. A number of interpretation methods are proposed reflecting the differing needs of a variety of users of the site. The applicant has undergone significant pre-application discussions with appropriate officers and the methods proposed are considered both visually and contextually appropriate given the special qualities of this very important location. The application is therefore considered wholly appropriate and subsequently recommended for approval.

8 Recommendation

8.1 Approve subject to the following conditions:

- (i) Time Limit
- (ii) In accordance with plans submitted
- (iii) Biodiversity enhancements to be submitted and agreed
- (iv) Archaeological Site Investigation to be submitted and agreed

9 Reasons for Recommendation

9.1 In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the development is acceptable in respect of Planning Policy and in particular in accordance with Policies CS1, CS5, CS6, CS9 and CS16 of the Core Strategy (2007) and Policies DP2, DP4, DP5, DP11, DP27, DP28 and DP29 of the Development Management Policies DPD (2011).

Background papers: BA/2013/0413/FUL
English Heritage- Easy Access to Historic Buildings (2012)
English Heritage- Easy Access to Historic Landscapes (2013)

Author: Kayleigh Wood
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List of Appendices: APPENDIX 1 – Site Location Plan

APPENDIX 1

BA/2013/0413/FUL - St Benet's Abbey, St Benet's Road, Ludham
Proposed erection of 3 interpretation lecterns, telescope installation, listening bench and car park sign on existing fence.

