

Sale of Geldeston Woodland and Marsh
Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report presents, for members' information, the current situation regarding the key matters relating to the proposed sale of an area of woodland at Geldeston.

Recommendation: That members note the contents of the report.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides members with information regarding the current situation relating to the proposed sale of an area of woodland and marsh at Geldeston on the River Waveney.
- 1.2 The Broads Authority owns land at Geldeston near the Geldeston Locks public house comprising a 64m long section of 24-hour public moorings, approximately 1 acre of woodland immediately behind the moorings and approximately 11 acres of marshland which has been used by the Authority as a dredging disposal site.
- 1.3 Officers identified that the area of woodland was no longer required for any specific purpose and the sale of the woodland was agreed under the scheme of powers delegated to the Chief Executive. At its meeting on the 10 May 2013 the Broads Authority resolved to proceed with the sale of the woodland by informal bid. However, subsequent reports on the matter were taken to the Broads Authority in November 2013 and March 2014 as the Parish Council, River Waveney Trust and Woodland Trust had put forward proposals for public purchase and use of the woodland. The Parish Council requested more time to put together a formal proposal but unfortunately it was not possible to negotiate a local proposal for the sale at this time.
- 1.4 While considering it unfortunate that a local solution could not be found the Authority resolved to proceed with the sale and in accordance with Section 123 (2A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the intention to sell the woodland was publicised in the public notice section (see Appendix 1) of the Eastern Daily Press for two consecutive weeks 12 and 19 May 2014 and in addition to the legal requirements three laminated notices were displayed close to the site, one on the approach to the woodland on Locks Lane and two at either side of the approach at the entrance to the woodland.
- 1.5 There were a number of local objections submitted in response to the advertisement and the River Waveney Trust nominated the woodland to be registered on the Assets of Community Value register under the Localism Bill

2011, with South Norfolk Council. The Council has since confirmed its decision to include the woodland on the register. This means that, if the asset comes to be sold, a moratorium of up to six months may be invoked on the sale in order to provide local groups with a better chance to raise finance, develop a business and to make a bid to buy the asset on the open market.

2 Current Situation

- 2.1 This matter was considered by the Authority at its meeting on the 11 July 2014. In view of the proposed addition of the land to the Assets of Community Value Register and the local concerns raised about the sale and the future use of the car park and marsh as a whole, the Broads Authority considered that a strategic view was required on the retention or disposal of all three pieces of land. Members should note that while the Authority did not wish to be in dispute with the local community, it did need to have regard to its budgetary constraints and liabilities regarding maintenance and safety of land in its possession.
- 2.2 The Authority therefore resolved to defer a decision on the sale of Geldeston Woodland until the November meeting in order to enable discussions to take place with the landlord of the Geldeston Locks Public House as well as the Waveney River Trust and Parish Council and to have a strategic view of all the land in the Authority's ownership in this location.

3 Access implications

- 3.1 While there is no formal public access to the woodland it has been habitually used by local residents and customers of the Geldeston Locks Public House for informal recreation. In light of this fact officers considered that should the sale proceed it would be appropriate to impose a covenant on the land to bind successive owners to an obligation that the area be open for public access.
- 3.2 There has been no public access to the area of marshland owned by the Authority as the site has been used, and will continue to be used from time to time, for the disposal of sediment dredged from the River Waveney.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 As the woodland is now registered on the Assets of community Value Register it is likely that any advertisement of its sale will invoke the moratorium procedure. However, in light of the resolution by the Broads Authority, officers have already met with the River Waveney Trust to discuss this matter and are expecting to have a further meeting to see if there is scope for negotiating a local solution to the issue of the sale.
- 4.2 No decision has been made regarding the sale of the marsh but if a sale of this land was proposed it is likely that any sale would also include a covenant requiring a new owner to continue to allow the Broads Authority to deposit dredgings on the land.

Background papers: Nil

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Broads Plan Objectives: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 Map showing areas of land owned by the Broads Authority at Geldeston

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