

**Consultation on Planning Application: Erection of Up to 3,520 Dwellings, 16,800 m<sup>2</sup> Employment Space, 8,800 m<sup>2</sup> Shops, Services, Cafes and Restaurants plus Hotel Accommodation, Two Schools, Community Space, Energy Centre, Cycle and Vehicle Parking, Public Open Space and Accesses on Site between Wroxham Road, Sprowston and St Faiths Road, Old Catton**  
Report by Head of Development Management

<b>Summary:</b>	The Broads Authority has been consulted by Broadland District Council in respect of an application for a mixed use development on land to the north of Norwich.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That no objection is raised to the application, but that comments are made regarding landscaping, bio-diversity mitigation and off-setting.

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) for Norwich City, Broadland District and South Norfolk Councils identifies 37,000 houses and 27,000 jobs to be delivered in the Greater Norwich Area up to 2026. The JCS was adopted in 2011, however, following a partially successful legal challenge in 2012, parts of it have been remitted back to the three authorities for repair. The revised JCS was submitted to the Secretary of State before Christmas. As part of the “repair” process the GNDP have identified that a floating small sites allowance of 2,000 homes is appropriate for the Broadland part of the Norwich Policy Area (NPA) leaving 7,000 new homes to be appropriately located within the NPA. The revised JCS “allocates” 7,000 dwellings north east of Norwich (including 25 hectares of employment land at Rackheath. This application forms part of this “allocation”

## **2 The Site and the Proposals**

- 2.1 The application site comprises 207.4 hectares of land to the north-east of Norwich. Located between Wroxham Road in Sprowston in the east (opposite Sprowston Manor) and St Faiths Road, Old Catton in the west, the site takes in mainly agricultural land and extends towards Beeston St Andrew in the north; to the south it is bounded by the built-up area of Norwich. It is located within the Old Catton, Sprowston and Thorpe St Andrew Growth Triangle.
- 2.2 The site is located 2km from the Broads Authority boundary at Dobbs Beck located to the south-west of Wroxham and east of Crostwick.

2.3 The application, which is in outline only, proposes a substantial mixed-use comprising up to 3,520 dwellings, 16,800 m<sup>2</sup> employment space, 8,800 m<sup>2</sup> shops, services, cafes and restaurants plus hotel accommodation, two schools, community space, energy centre, cycle and vehicle parking, public open space and accesses. The development, which would function effectively as an urban extension, would include two new public squares around which the community-related development (for example shops and leisure uses) would be situated, with the housing and employment development beyond this. A substantial area of public open space of approximately 35 hectares is proposed to the north-east of the site at Beeston Park and in total the site would accommodate around 50ha of linked public open space. The development would be constructed in six Phases over a period of 15 – 20 years, with the masterplan layout and phasing scheme designed to replicate the traditional evolution of a settlement.

2.4 The phasing would be as follows:

- Phase 1: Re-alignment east of B1150 North Walsham Road, plus residential, business, retail and community development in vicinity of Main Square (off the B1150). Initial development in vicinity of Wroxham Road Square to the east. Access for school.
- Phase 2: Continued residential and business development in vicinity of Main Square, plus main retail development. Similar but reduced level of development in vicinity of Wroxham Road Square. Development of main east-west road link. Landscaping of open space links west of Beeston Park and creation of recreation ground.
- Phase 3: Completion of east-west link and 'backfilling' of residential development. Completion of open space links west of Beeston park. Main phase for business development.
- Phase 4: Completion of Main Square and Wroxham Road Square neighbourhoods. Development focused in Old Catton and Spixworth areas with 'backfilling' in other neighbourhood areas. Second recreation ground completed. Second primary school completed.
- Phase 5: Completion of Beeston Park neighbourhood, plus 'backfilling' of other neighbourhoods. Third recreation ground completed.
- Phase 6: Completion of 'backfilling' on more periphery plots.

2.5 A phasing overview table as follows has been provided:

Phase		1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Housing units	No.	590	610	577	588	575	580	3,520
Business	Sqm	5,400	2,750	8,650	0	0	0	16,800
Retail	Sqm	2,450	5,050	800	200	200	100	8,800
Community	Sqm	3,000*	1,000	300	2,700*	0	0	7,000

2.6 The planning application is accompanied by a Planning Statement in which the applicant explains that in bringing forward the development, the applicant intends to work collaboratively as a 'master planner' with landowners, developers, local communities and stakeholders and statutory bodies. The scheme would be front-loaded with a large proportion of the infrastructure, including the community facilities (for example one of the schools and recreation grounds) in the early phases of the development and it is intended that this will enable the evolution of the development in a traditional incremental manner. The application is in outline so further information will need to be provided in due course, however the overall layout and the scale of the proposal are clear.

### 3 Assessment

3.1 The application site is at its closest point 2km from the Broads and due to this the development would not be visible from the Broads, nor would it be likely to have a substantial landscape impact on its setting. It is also considered that due to this distance it would be unlikely to have a direct impact on its ecology. The main impact generated by this proposal would be the potential for additional recreational pressure upon the Broads from additional visitors which would be expected to be generated by the development. These additional visitors would generate impacts through their recreational activities e.g localised dog walking, children's play, but also at weekends, potential for increased family recreation further into the Broads increasing numbers at key times. Both the localised recreation and the additional weekend recreation has the potential to increase strain on an already fragile area which is extremely important for wildlife. There would also be an impact generated by the water needs of the new households and this specific issue has been the basis of representations by the Authority made in respect of the Joint Core Strategy in 2010/11.

3.2 Considering first the issue of increased visitor pressure and the impacts of this, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the creation of 3,520 new households to the north-east of Norwich would result in an increase in visitor numbers to the Broads, especially given the proximity to Wroxham, which is a popular visitor hub, and the ease of access to sites on the River Yare east of

Norwich. Recreational pressure has the potential to cause adverse effects on internationally designated sites, for example through trampling, nutrient enrichment and disturbance to wildlife. Some research on this issue was carried out by Norfolk Wildlife Services (NWS) on behalf of the GNDP in 2011. Within the International Sites of the Broads, two soil types will be particularly vulnerable; peat soils (of valley fens) are easily compacted and therefore subject to increased erosion and sandy soils (of dunes and coastal sites) are susceptible to heavy erosion on well-used paths particularly near to car parks or access points. Associated issues from visitor usage on habitats and wildlife can occur through accidental fires (sometimes an issue on dune habitats). Different activities also cause different degrees of damage. For instance, vehicles on un-surfaced tracks will cause more damage than walking. Walkers with dogs have potential to cause greater disturbance to birds and other animals as dogs are less likely to keep to marked footpaths. Dogs can also contribute to nutrient enrichment through their fouling. Kite flying and kite surfing can cause disturbances to sensitive species.

- 3.3. The data for the Broads International Sites is far from comprehensive, but does allow some general conclusions to be made and this was highlighted in the NWS work:
- The International Sites receive very large numbers of visitors (the Broads has 7million tourist visits p.a.).
  - Day visitors are coming from a wide catchment (e.g. 12% from outside the eastern counties).
  - Boat use is high and the potential for effects on wildlife from associated activities are large.
  - The majority of visitors take short walks in the area and therefore there is potential for land-based disturbance, however the number of visitors to Key Nature Reserves (NWT Hickling NNR, NWT Ranworth, RSPB Strumpshaw) are moderate.
- 3.4 To mitigate this some sites are actively promoted with visitor facilities such as car parks, toilets, bird hides, nature/walking trails and visitor centres. These enable visitors to enjoy the wildlife of the region in a managed way. Examples of promoted sites include:
- Hickling NNR (NWT);
  - Strumpshaw Fen (RSPB);
  - How Hill (Broads Authority);
  - Ranworth floating visitor centre (NWT);
  - Horsey Estate (National Trust).
- 3.5 Other sites offer limited access but are not promoted and do not have visitor facilities. Generally they have very small (or no) car parks and no visitor centres or toilets, although they may have low-key way-marked nature trails. Example sites include NWT Upton Fen, NWT Alderfen Broad and parts of the Ant and Bure Marshes.

- 3.6 Other areas within the International Site have no public access, either being privately owned (e.g. parts of the Ant and Bure Marshes) or deliberately restricted so as not to adversely affect wildlife (e.g. RSPB Sutton Fen).
- 3.7 Some individual component SSSIs and local parts of International Sites experience very high numbers of visitors. There are several of these honey-pot sites at the coast and in the Broads. However, visitor pressure varies in intensity across these sites and there are areas where visitor pressure is likely to be considerably less. It is presumed, for example, in the Broads SAC that four or five of the 28 component SSSIs receive the majority of the landbased visitor pressure. It follows that any adverse effects from land-based recreation will probably therefore be concentrated in these locations.
- 3.8 The GNDP's Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment in February 2010 which stated that uncertainty remained regarding the potential of in-combination and cumulative effects associated with growth and tourism on European and Ramsar designated sites resulting from the planned growth within the GNDP area. It indicated that uncertainty could be reduced through the implementation of green infrastructure developments and the allocation of green space to protect specific natural assets and designated sites.
- 3.9 The visitor survey data indicate that people living in new developments within the GNDP area will be in the catchment of all the International Sites. If they venture into the countryside, they are probably likely to visit the well-known honey-pot sites in the Broads, or individual component units of the other International Sites - but only if they live very near to them.
- 3.10 It is accepted that there are components within the scheme which will contribute to recreational facilities on-site – the approximately 35ha Beeston Park, for example, would provide an alternative and local facility for residents and local dog walkers. These components will provide displacement interest and take the pressure off the Broads and this is welcome. However, it is the case that increased pressure from increased visitor numbers can be a major issue in the Broads and at the key sites and at peak times the impact of the numbers is severe. The impacts are not just on ecology - bank erosion from boat wash has impacts not just on landscape character and appearance and protection from flooding, but contributes to poor water quality and sedimentation, as well increasing the need for costly dredging to maintain the navigation channel.
- 3.11 It is an established principle of planning that a developer can only be required to mitigate for the impacts of his development, however there is an absence of specific information to assess the impacts of increased visitor pressure from a development of this size and scale.
- 3.12 This is a large site, however, and whilst it is accepted that it is some distance from the Broads and would not have any direct impact, it is the case that the areas adjacent to the Broads provide an important buffer in landscape terms between the Broads and its more developed hinterlands and, crucially, create

transitional habitats which support valuable Broads wildlife. Locally the Broads has experienced a documented loss of six species per decade since the 1950s. These species have been mainly lost in semi-natural or uncultivated areas around the margins of the Broads, where land has been radically altered by development or cultivation. There is the opportunity for all development to make a contribution to halting and reversing this pattern of decline through the incorporation of green infrastructure and bio-diversity measures within proposals. In this case, whilst there is green infrastructure proposed, it is considered that this could be usefully extended and other bio-diversity features including hibernacula and owl and kestrel boxes incorporated into the development. Alternatively, the developer might consider bio-diversity off-setting whereby a contribution is paid and used to re-establish compensatory habitats off-site. This approach would also address the issue of the hard-to-quantify impacts of increased visitor pressure referred to above.

- 3.13 The above identifies the potential adverse effects associated with increased visitor numbers arising from the development, however it is the case that visitors contribute significantly to the Broads economy and the importance of this is acknowledged, indeed it is reflected in the statutory purposes of the Authority.
- 3.14 Finally, it is the case that there would be an increased water demand associated with the proposed development. As part of the development of the JCS, the GNDP undertook a water cycle study to look at water availability within the partnership area and this concluded that sufficient water capacity would be available to support this level of new development provided that investment was made early in specific areas of water infrastructure e.g Whitlingham that a new mains sewer was provided north of the city and that proposed new development incorporated high levels of water efficiency measures.

#### **4 Conclusion and Recommendation**

- 4.1 This is an application for a major urban extension to the north of Norwich and which would have a significant impact on the local area for a prolonged period. It is not immediately adjacent to the Broads so the direct impacts would be limited, however there would be likely to be an increase in visitor pressure on the Broads as a consequence of the population growth.
- 4.2 It is recommended that the green infrastructure component be strengthened to improve bio-diversity and increase habitat resilience and that enhanced bio-diversity measures are incorporated. It is also recommended that the developer consider bio-diversity off-setting.

Background papers: Nil

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Appendices: APPENDIX 1 – Location Plan

BA/2012/0349/NEIGHB - Land north of Sprowston / Old Catton, between Wroxham Road & St Faiths Rd, Sprowston  
Erection of a single wind turbine of up to 2MW rated output capacity

