

# Broads Authority

12 May 2023

Agenda item number 9

## Broads Peat project- update

Report by Carbon Reduction Project Manager & Environment Policy Adviser

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### Purpose

To update Members on the progress of the Broads Peat project which is funded through the Peatland Discovery Grant, including developments since the report to the Authority meeting on 17 March 2023.

### Broads Plan context

A3 Agree carbon reduction targets for the Broads National Park and promote action to reduce emissions

B2 Promote best practice water capture and usage across the Broadland Rivers Catchment and reduce point and diffuse pollution into the floodplain and water courses

B3 Seek biodiversity net gain and nature-based solutions and enhance areas of fen, reed bed, grazing marsh, and wet woodland, to protect peatlands as carbon sinks

B5 Improve partnership coordination and communication of Broads biodiversity monitoring and research effort

D1 Protect and enhance local built and cultural features, archaeology, geodiversity and potential hidden heritage, including 'at risk' assets

F3 Provide and expand schools-based and outreach environmental education opportunities for young people, using the Broads as a learning resource

### Recommended decision

- i. Note the updates; and
  - ii. in view of the short timescale, to delegate to the Chief Executive the decision on whether to submit a Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme Restoration Bid for Buttle Marsh to Natural England.
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Broads Peat Project was awarded £785,668 in December 2021 from Defra, up to the end of March 2023, as part of the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme – Discovery Grant (which is administered by Natural England), to explore the opportunities for peatland restoration in the Broads. An extension to 31 August 2023 was approved recently, and the project budget was revised to £1,125,831. Since April

2023, the Carbon Reduction Project Manager is providing additional support to the project.

- 1.2. Previous reports were provided to the January and March 2023 Broads Authority meetings. At the March meeting it was agreed by Members to accept an extension of the project covering 1 April 2023 to 31 August 2023. The Change Control Notice from Natural England has now been signed.
- 1.3. This report provides an update on progress made, and changes to the workplan that have arisen since the meeting on 17 March. It also sets out the next steps for submitting a Restoration Grant bid to Natural England under the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme.

## 2. Progress Updates

- 2.1. A restoration and monitoring plan has been prepared for Buttle Marsh, with a proposal for private match funding to support the bid. Buttle Marsh is a nature reserve near How Hill, on the eastern side of the River Ant, with scrapes and reed beds.
- 2.2. Buttle Marsh is owned and managed by the Broads Authority. It has no statutory designations. The aim of the restoration is to restore sustainable peat building conditions, enhance biodiversity and provide the necessary infrastructure and prescriptions for long-term sustainable management of 25.60ha of rewetted peatland. The restoration would include holding and retaining water, and raising water from the IDB drain as required in the summer, to maintain in-field wetness within Buttle Marsh.
- 2.3. Under the terms of the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme 25% “non-exchequer” funding is required – essentially in our case this means private sector investment. The estimated total value of the bid is approximately £215,000. The exact budget will be developed leading up to the submission date of 26 May 2023.
- 2.4. If private match funding is secured, the application would be submitted for a restoration grant at Buttle Marsh. If the grant is successful, work would begin in the autumn 2023 and the Broads Authority would apply for the relevant consents, including planning permission.
- 2.5. If we are unable to obtain assurance for securing the private match funding, then the bid would not be submitted, and under the terms of the extension agreed with Natural England, further work on the project extension would cease at that point.
- 2.6. The other sites reported on in the March 2023 report are currently paused or withdrawn, and are unlikely to be put forward for restoration bids. This is for a variety of reasons, primarily related to finance. Under the newly published UK Peatland Code version 2, carbon credits are not offering sufficient benefits for landowners to make the transition in the relatively small Broads areas being considered (less than 25 hectares).

### 3. Submission of Peatland Restoration Bid

- 3.1. The deadline for the submission of a restoration bid is 26 May 2023. Given the short timescales for submitting the bid and the awaited decision on the availability of private finance we are recommending that members delegate the decision on whether to submit a restoration bid for Buttle Marsh to the Chief Executive.

### 4. Financial implications

- 4.1. The full costs of the restoration at Buttle Marsh would be covered by the Nature for Climate Peatland Scheme Restoration Grant and private match funding. A condition is that the match funding does not include Treasury finance, for example National Park Grant. The Authority is therefore unable to provide the match funding itself. There would therefore be no significant financial implications for the Authority.
- 4.2. Where existing Broads Authority staff are deployed to the project, their costs would be included in the restoration budget and claimed. The reimbursement of the staff costs could be used to fund backfilling of existing posts.

### 5. Risk implications

- 5.1. The Project Risk Register is reported and updated at the internal Project Board (every two weeks) and endorsed by the Peat Partnership Project Steering Group. There are two major outstanding risks;
- 5.2. If we are not able to obtain assurance for or a strategy for securing the necessary private co-finance, then we will not be able to proceed with the restoration bid.
- 5.3. As recorded in the 17 March Broads Authority Report, the Environment Agency has resource constraints for working on flood risk and water resource permissions. This is likely to result in delays to the permissions. If the permitting processes are not finalised before the end date of the Broads Peat extension, these activities would be need to be continued into the Restoration phase.

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Date of report: 26 April 2023

Background papers: [Broads Authority 17 March 2023 Agenda Item number 11](#)

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: A3, B2, B3, B5, D1, F3