

## **Chief Executive's Report**

**Summary:** This report summarises the current position in respect of a number of important projects and events, including any decisions taken during the recent cycle of committee meetings. It does not include matters which are already on the agenda for this meeting of the Committee. Members are asked to note the report.

### **1 Relocation to Yare House**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: John Packman/None

- 1.1 The Broads Authority moved to Dragonfly House in December 2008, sharing the accommodation with key Defra funded partners, Natural England and the Environment Agency. The decision to move to Dragonfly House was made by the Authority on 9 May 2008, following a review of the costs presented in Defra's Stakeholder Paper issued in March 2008. At this point in time the total costs were estimated at £379,067 per annum.
- 1.2 The costs for Dragonfly House have risen since the Authority's initial occupation due to Treasury and Government Department guidance on how to recharge certain costs. This situation prompted the Authority to re-consider its occupation of Dragonfly House; especially when coupled with the need to pursue savings and efficiencies to meet the reduction in National Park Grant and the reduced space required for fewer staff. Since the lease for Dragonfly House has not been signed, the Authority can vacate the premises at any time and Defra Estates has confirmed that it would not seek to stop the Authority from relocating. In addition, the Authority's sponsor in Defra has advised that Defra would support the Authority vacating the building if it could find a cheaper alternative, as that would mean that more of its resource could be focussed on the Authority's core activities.
- 1.3 A comprehensive appraisal has been conducted by the Authority to seek to reduce the costs of its head office. This has included comparing the option of staying in Dragonfly House, with reduced floor occupancy, with other suitable buildings in the Norwich area which was the Authority's preferred area location. Following this appraisal process, members identified Yare House on Thorpe Road in Norwich as the most cost and operationally effective solution to meet the Authority's main office requirements.
- 1.4 The recurring revenue costs for Yare House are forecast at £271,318 per annum which represents a 28% percentage saving on the 2008 Stakeholder costs for Dragonfly House; this is commensurate with the percentage reduction in National Park Grant which the Authority has to accommodate between 2010/11 and 2014/15. Members considered that the impact of the ongoing reduced premises costs would be significant in allowing the Authority

to meet the reductions in NPG, whilst maintaining front-line services at the highest level possible. Members therefore agreed on 13 July 2012 to proceed with finalising a Lease and a Tenants Fit Out Work (TFOW) contract for Yare House.

- 1.5 The relocation will require a fit out of the new premises which, along with removals, audio visual equipment, furniture and professional charges, will amount to approximately £344,000. Though this is a large capital sum, the Landlord of Yare House has provided an 18 month rent free period, which will defray this cost by just over £200,000. Following consultation with the Chairman of the Authority and Chairman of the Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee, in accordance with the Authority's resolution on 13 July 2012, the Agreement for Lease was signed on 6 September 2012 at the same time as the TFOW contract. The lease will commence five working days following the practical completion of the TFOW contract, which provides a forecast lease commencement date of 12 November 2012. The lease will be for a period of 15 years with a tenant break any time after 10 years subject to six months prior written notice. To allow a relocation transition period, it is intended to complete relocation from Dragonfly House on 30 November and become operational at Yare House on 3 December 2012. This will mean that the office will be closed to the public on 29 and 30 November 2012 whilst the major removals take place.
- 1.6 The Authority's proactive decision to relocate early within the term of the current Spending Review will mean that the Authority will be able to maintain front-line services at the highest possible level.

## **2 Dockyard Workshop Development Update**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: John Packman/None

- 2.1 A letter of intent for the construction of the new workshop at the Griffin Lane Dockyard was signed on 22 August 2012, facilitating a projected completion date in April 2013. This development will greatly improve the Authority's facilities and capacity to maintain vessels and vehicles. Funding from PRISMA is supporting the project because the new workshop will enable the Authority to make modifications to plant and equipment used for dredging.

## **3 Million Ponds Scheme**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Andrea Kelly/BD3.2, 3.3, 4.2 and 4.3

- 3.1 In partnership with landowners, the RSPB and Butterfly Conservation the Authority is helping to create an extensive network of new ponds across the UK. The initiative is part of Phase 1 of the Million Ponds Project which runs from 2008 to 2012 and aims to create the first 5,000 clean water ponds in England and Wales.
- 3.2 The Million Ponds Project is the initiative of Pond Conservation (funded by Biffa landfill tax and public donations) with an aim to reverse a century of pond loss, ensuring that once again the UK has over one million countryside ponds. Turf ponds do not occur naturally in fens and need to be created as part of the

mosaic of management techniques. Temporary ponds within fen habitats guarantee clean water, are rich in wildlife, resist climate extremes by retaining open water for longer during drought and as they are left to succeed to fen they recreate the valuable reedswamp that has all but disappeared in Broadland. Evidence shows that over 15 national priority species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan will benefit from this project alone in the Ant Valley. These include the Bittern, Tubular Water Dropwort, Fen Orchid, Shining Ram's Horn Snail and Norfolk Hawker all taking advantage of the different successional stages of the pond. Across the UK most ponds are now badly damaged by pollution, and evidence shows that pond wildlife is declining. Making clean new ponds is one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect freshwater wildlife.

3.3 Sites for pond creation in the Ant Valley were selected based on a number of factors including:

- discussions with Natural England and the Environment Agency on site groundwater;
- examination of sediment stratigraphy and species;
- flood risk assessments;
- additional benefits in terms of scrub removal;
- connecting wetland and upland habitats; and
- collecting evidence for future management based on an experimental approach.

3.4 The Authority received £20,000 during 2012/13 to create 43 ponds (23 ponds plus 4 pond complexes of up to 5 ponds each). These were located at How Hill, Catfield and Sutton Fens. Pond Conservation are delighted with the Ant Valley Project and have extended funding to pond creation in drained areas including Buckenham Marshes (Yare Valley) and Oulton Marshes (Waveney Valley).

3.5 In addition to the Million Ponds project, over the past three years the Authority has created a further seven ponds around Filby Broad and on Burgh Common. Already three species of stoneworts (the delicate and pollution sensitive macro-algae) have been recorded. This underpins the status of the Broads as the UK as an Important Stonewort area, as designated by Plantlife Conservation Charity. In addition the ponds have resulted in the second county record for a Small-fruited Yellow Sedge and Norfolk Hawker, Grass Snake, Common Toad, Reed Bunting, Lapwing and Greenshank have been observed feeding in these new wetland areas. Further ponds will provide significant conservation gains. It is hoped that the new Broads visitor giving scheme will help contribute towards funding this essential work.

3.6 The Broads Authority is running a Turf Pond Workshop in November at Sutton Fen to communicate the learning from the project to extend this essential management work to other suitable sites in the Broads.

#### **4 St Benets Abbey Update**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Lesley Marsden/LC2, PE2, PE3, PE3.4 and TR1

- 4.1 The Broads Authority is undertaking a partnership project with The Norfolk Archaeological Trust at St Benet's Abbey. This was agreed in November 2010 by the Broads Authority. The link to the report is <http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/broads/live/authority/meetings/broads-authority/2010/11-19/%5Breport%5D%20St%20Benets%20Restoration%20Project.pdf>  
The minutes of the resolution can be found at [http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/broads/live/authority/meetings/broads-authority/2011/01-21/\[minutes\]%20BA%20191110M.pdf](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/broads/live/authority/meetings/broads-authority/2011/01-21/[minutes]%20BA%20191110M.pdf)
- 4.2 A number of small revisions to the original planning application will be submitted to the Broads Authority shortly. These include some minor changes and enhancements to the footpath design from the moorings to the gatehouse, and they will indicate a location for a commemorative seat and the location of an interpretation panel. The Norfolk Archaeological Trust has recently received planning permission for the erection of an estate fence along the route of the footpath from the car park to the site. This additional fencing was considered necessary to stop cattle from damaging the surface of the easy access path.
- 4.3 Broads Authority staff are involved in a range of construction activities to facilitate access to the site. The cost of all the construction materials is being met by grant funding obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust. Broads Authority staff time is being used as a match funding element for this grant. By the end of October 2012 the car park and footpath lying adjacent to the existing vehicular track will be finished and the timber post and rail fencing and gates around the car park area will have been erected. The estate fencing separating the track from the new path will be erected in early November. Planting work will take place over the winter period. Once this phase has been completed Broads Authority staff will leave the site and return in March 2013 to complete the remaining access work around the remains of the monument and along the floodwall to the 24 hour moorings plus further fencing work to the monument site. This next phase will also include the erection of some of the interpretation panels designed to have minimal landscape impact.
- 4.4 Major conservation work to the gatehouse and mill structure will have been completed by the end of October. The scaffolding will be removed by that time. 3,500 hand-made bricks, supplied by Bulmer Brick and Tile Company near Sudbury, have been used in the course of the building repairs and only three worked stones have needed replacement on the gatehouse. Spring next year will see the start of the building conservation work on the precinct walls and the Abbey Church.
- 4.5 To date there have been adult training events on graffiti recording and molehill archaeology. The graffiti recording will extend to 28 churches within the locality which were controlled by the Abbey in the medieval period. 80

schoolchildren from three local schools (Catfield, Ludham and Hoveton St John) and a home educated group, have been on site undertaking molehill archaeology and graffiti recording events. Archive training to about 25, mainly local, people has been delivered. They now have the task to undertake research about the Abbey and their findings will feed into the interpretation.

4.6 Blundeston training prison have been providing between 2-3 people to assist in the construction of the car park. This arrangement has been working very well and the standard of workmanship delivered by those working on site has been high.

4.7 The project is within budget and to timescale.

## **5 Replacement Fen Harvester**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Rob Rogers/BD4.2

5.1 The Fen Harvester is a very specialised item of plant and the search for a company to provide the new Wetland Harvester has been narrowed down to two companies.

5.2 In August, officers viewed a machine from Loglogic (the manufacturers of the existing Wetland Harvester), called the Softrak. The Softrak has been developed to be a multifunctional machine capable of cutting fen, but with extra attachments which can be purchased, enabling it carry out other tasks in difficult terrain, such as cutting and bundling, or transporting tools and equipment in wetland locations. The Authority has been working with Loglogic and provided a specification for them to price. The second company is based in the USA, with manufacturing bases throughout Europe and they make a machine called a 'Pisten Bully'. The RSPB operate one of these harvesters in Bangor, Wales and officers will be visiting this machine in late October to assess its suitability, weight and size to see if this is a contender for the replacement of our wetland harvester. Following this visit a decision will be made and an order placed to purchase the most suitable machine for our tasks.

5.3 The budget for a new machine is £100,000 and the Softrak from Loglogic falls within this budget. An estimate and full specification from Pisten Bully will be sought following the site visit.

## **6 Landscape Sensitivity Study for Wind Turbines, Photovoltaics and Associated Infrastructure**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Lesley Marsden/LC4 and LC4.2

6.1 Increasingly, there is more pressure for renewable energy production in the UK. This has seen a rise in planning applications for both single and multiple turbine developments (of both small and large scale) in and within the setting of the Broads area.

6.2 In March this year a study was commissioned which updated the existing Broads Landscape Character assessment and in tandem, completed an

assessment of the sensitivity of the Broads landscape to potential visual impacts and changes to experiential characteristics, from wind turbine and photovoltaic development and associated infrastructure. The original Landscape Character assessment set out the key characteristics of 31 local character areas. The new study added a greater level of detail to these and in addition identified, in agreement with the project board, those perceptual and experiential characteristics that contribute to the highly valued special qualities of the Broads. The study then used these characteristics as criteria against which the potential impacts of a typical range of renewable energy developments may have on the landscape character of the area. The resulting study now provides clear information for the evaluation of future planning applications in relation to proposed developments both within and on the boundary of the Broads Authority's executive area. The information was produced with the following audience in mind:

- Planning officers from the Broads and adjacent authorities
- The general public
- Planning applicants and their professional agents
- Local communities e.g. parish council's
- Land managers

6.3 The findings of the study vary depending on the location in the Broads and the scale of the development. The link to both the study and the presentation to the Broads Authority can be found within the Landscape Character Assessment page which sits within the Planning section of the Broads Authority's web site at <http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/planning/landscape-character-assessment/landscape-studies/landscape-sensitivity-study-for-renewables-infrastructure.html>

6.4 The Broads Executive area's neighbouring planning authorities were fully consulted about the aims of the study. The findings have been disseminated to the relevant district officers. Parish councils have also been informed about the project and provided a link to the study.

6.5 The study is to form the basis of one of the workshop events to be held in November at a conference for National Park Planning officers entitled - Tackling Climate Change through Planning.

## **7 Integrated Access Strategy**

Contact Officer/Broads Plan Objective: Adrian Clarke/TR3 and TR3.1

7.1 Work is progressing on the Integrated Access Strategy and a draft strategy document detailing the way in which the Broads Authority proposes to manage and develop access in the Broads will be presented at the next meeting of the Forum. The Strategy will set out a number of key objectives and explain how the Authority intends to prioritise access projects in the future. The Strategy will have rolling action plans identifying priority projects for access development.

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Broads Plan Objectives: LC2, LC4, LC4.2, PE2, PE3, PE3.4, TR1, BD3.2, BD3.3, BD4.2, BD4.3, TR3 and TR3.1

Appendices: Nil