

## **Acle Bridge Site**

Report by Chief Executive, Historic Environment Manager, and Asset Officer

**Summary:** Members of the Working Group appointed at the last Authority meeting together with three other volunteers visited the site in the middle of February. They considered options for the interim use of the Acle Bridge site for this year and also developed longer-term aspirations and a draft list of facilities to be provided. Following on from this it is recommended that the Authority approach a number of architectural practices for initial responses to a design brief to help take the project forward. The results of the further discussions at the Working Group's second meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March together with the feedback from initial invitations to the architectural practices will be reported to the meeting.

### **Recommendations**

- (i) Linda Aspland, Lana Hemsall and James Knight are appointed to the Working Group;
- (ii) A quality mobile café operator be appointed for the 2018 season following an appropriate procurement process;
- (iii) Support the outline list of key components for the development and the list of facilities as set out in section 3.
- (iv) Support the decision, following the second meeting of the Working Group, to invite a range of architectural practices with experience in designing visitor centres to participate in a competition to submit initial design ideas. The Working Group is asked to judge the submissions and recommend a design approach back to the Authority.

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 In August 2017 the Broads Authority purchased the moorings on the North West side of Acle Bridge for £180,000. The site had been identified as a high priority in the Authority's Mooring Strategy and purchase was authorised in May 2017. Although the initial purpose was to secure the moorings for public use the site clearly had potential for providing other services.
- 1.2 In order to open up the site as a Broads Authority free 24 hour mooring we undertook some basic timber replacement, added some mooring posts and made rudimentary repairs to the grassed bank. Further works are needed, programmed between May & July 2018/19, to replace some more timbers and level and raise the path to keep the mooring to a suitable standard. The mooring will remain open during this work and disruption will be kept to a minimum.

1.3 Six Members (James Bensly, Matthew Bradbury, Bill Dickson, Bruce Keith, Nicky Talbot, Haydn Thirtle) volunteered at the Authority's last meeting to work with officers to develop plans for the site and bring back proposals to a future meeting. Since then Linda Aspland, Lana Hempsall and James Knight have also offered their services. Although nine is a larger group than originally envisaged it brings the benefit of a wide range of experience and connections with the local community. It is therefore proposed that they are all appointed to the Group.

1.4 A first meeting of the Group was held on 14<sup>th</sup> February (six members attended) and a second arranged for the 8<sup>th</sup> March, after the deadline for this report. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

## 2 Summer Season 2018

2.1 The Working Group explored the alternative opportunities for generating income from the site for the coming summer season. They concluded that the former café/shop building is not in a suitable condition for the sale of food and drink and that a better solution would be to lease the site to the operator of a good quality mobile café. This would have a number of benefits including the opportunity to test the market for a more permanent facility. Officers are in the process of seeking expressions of interest from the market. Progress will be reported to the meeting.

## 3 Key Components and Facilities

3.1 The Working Group with officer support is working up a detailed brief for the development of the site and a further update on progress will be provided to the meeting. The Group is promoting the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the overall development of the site which allows the Authority to provide mooring and educational facilities but accepts that any businesses (such as the café, day boats etc.) would be run by private operators.

3.2 The overall intention is to invest National Park Grant reserves matched by external funding to construct a building which is operated in partnership with the private sector and thereby provides an income to support the education, visitor services and other national park activities. The Working Group recognises that a full business case will need to be developed but at this initial stage of the project's development the intention has been to develop a clear understanding of the overall ambition and the facilities that should be provided. Further ideas from Authority members would be most welcome.

3.3 The key components identified at the first meeting are:

1. A **landmark building** sensitive to the landscape and demonstrating modern techniques and providing views across the Broads landscape. A building which celebrates the rich cultural traditions and unique landscape of the Broads National Park.
2. **Multi-purpose building** including - Education Centre for school groups combined with a Café/Multi-purpose space with provision for the

activities to expand out of doors when the weather is good. Space to be capable of also being used for training and public events. The café should be able to include a bar for evening events and space to sell a small range of basic goods.

3. Rather than a dedicated space for **interpretation** the building itself should tell the story of the Broads, its history and importance as well as key sustainability issues.
4. The site should have an adequate number of **toilets and showers** to meet the needs of visiting boats at the peak in the summer) and passing trade for the café and school groups in term time.
5. **Car and coach parking** for visitors and school parties. Potential for a cycle hire facility.
6. **Demonstration elements** – flood risk management/development in the flood plain, sustainability and electric charging points for vehicles – all to be incorporated within design.
7. **Facilities for visiting boats** to the site including waste disposal, washing machines and Wi-Fi.
8. **Slipway** for launching small motor boats with access such that a crane could lift Broads Authority vessels in and out of the water as necessary. A day-boat hire operation.
9. Investigate the potential for a **marina**.
10. Sign posting long distance Weavers Way and encouraging people to get out into the landscape. In this regard there will be a strong link up with projects under the HLF funded Water, Mills and Marshes programme.
11. Low maintenance building suitable for public use and the wear and tear associated and therefore using some high quality materials and fittings.
12. A design which is in keeping with the Authority's core values, is in accord with planning policies, responds to the constraints and exploits the opportunities of the site.

#### **4 Developing Initial Design Concepts**

- 4.1 The Working Group has support the procurement of a concept design for the site. Architectural practices will be invited to express interest in submitting, in competition, an initial design for the site along with details of any associated costs. They will be asked to respond to the key requirements and list of facilities in the brief as set out in para 3.2 producing no more than 2 A1 presentation boards which illustrate their design concept for the site and explaining how they have responded to the constraints and opportunities the site offers. Each practice will be expected to present their concepts to the Working Group.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The scale of any potential income from a short term lease of the site to a mobile café operator is unknown at the time of writing this report and any further information will be reported to the meeting.
- 5.2 At this very early stage in the development of this project it is recognised that there are many unknowns associated with it and risks that will have to be

identified and managed. The Authority will need to have a full understanding of the capital costs and sources of funding before proceeding, along with realistic figures for income and expenditure.

- 5.3 Using the expertise of a group of architectural practices to narrow down the options and identify some of the key issues in taking the project forward is a prudent and low risk approach. At this stage it is not known if there will be any costs associated with producing the concept designs by the architects.
- 5.4 Adjacent to the site are public toilets, owned by Great Yarmouth Borough Council which are closed and have been damaged in the recent storms. The Authority is in discussion with the Council for the purchase of the toilets and an update will be provided at the meeting.

Background papers:	None
Author:	John Packman, Ben Hogg, Angie Leeper
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Broads Plan Objectives:	Many of the objectives in the Plan will be relevant to opportunities presented by the site.
Appendices:	None