

Planning Committee

13 February 2026

Agenda item number 7.1

BA/2025/0287/FUL How Hill Nature Reserve, How Hill, Ludham

Report by Planning Officer

Proposal

Replacement of wooden boardwalk and bridge with recycled plastic

Applicant

Broads Authority

Recommendation

Approve

Reason for referral to committee

The Broads Authority is the applicant.

Application target date

05 December 2025

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1. Description of site and proposals

- 1.1. The How Hill site is located in the north of the Broads, in the valley of the River Ant between the villages of Irstead to the north and Ludham to the south. The site forms a nature reserve within which is How Hill House, a Grade II listed building used as an education centre.
- 1.2. The location of this application site is to the west of the main How Hill site and to the northeast of Reedham Water. The Reedham Marshes Wildlife Water Trail is open annually from Easter to the end of October and provides access to the National Nature Reserve for the public. The trail is accessed by transportation in the Electric Eel boat which is moored on the River Ant near Toad Hole Cottage to the east. As part of the trail there is an opportunity for passengers to get off the boat and walk to a bird hide that overlooks Reedham Water. The walking route runs alongside and through a section of wet woodland. Part of the route is unsurfaced however the area through the woodland is currently surfaced with a timber boardwalk which is regularly inundated with water. The boardwalk is connected across an open water dyke by a timber bridge to a further length of boardwalk through fen which leads to the bird hide. The proposal seeks to replace the existing bridge and boardwalk as both are nearing the end of their serviceable life.
- 1.3. The design of the replacement boardwalk will be almost identical to the existing except for a change of materials to recycled plastic. Dimensions of the walkway will be the same (1.3m wide), with an additional runner along the edges which will provide an extra safety measure, giving a more visible edge to the boardwalk. The sleepers may need to be slightly closer together for added strength, but this will not result in a noticeable change.
- 1.4. The current arched bridge will be dismantled and replaced identically to the existing structure. The supporting structures may need to be replaced; however, this will not be evident until works commence. In any event, the supports will be replaced like for like, timber and metal as they currently are. The bridge deck boards will be replaced with recycled plastic.

2. Site history

- 2.1. BA/2021/0472/FUL - Replacement of wooden boardwalk with recycled plastic and replacement of arched wooden bridge with horizontal wooden alternative.

Approved 04 February 2022.

3. Consultations received

Parish Council

- 3.1. Ludham Parish Council – supports the application.

In order to minimise light pollution, the Parish Council recommends that any outdoor lights associated with this proposed development should be:

1. fully shielded (enclosed in full glass cut-off fitments)
2. directed downwards (mounted horizontally to the ground and not tilted upwards)
3. switched on only when needed (no dusk to dawn lamps)
4. white light low energy lamps (Philips Cosmopolis or fluorescent) and not orange or pink sodium sources)

In order to encourage biodiversity, the Parish Council encourages a suitable planting plan to support biodiversity. In order to encourage biodiversity, the Parish Council encourages all applicants to consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions.

Ward Member

- 3.2. This application can be determined by the Head of Planning (delegated decision)

BNG Consultant

- 3.3. The project involves like for like replacement of raised boardwalk and foot bridge. There will be no changes to cover types and impacts are expected to be temporary.
- 3.4. The nature of the planned works require consent under a full planning application that if granted would include the mandatory biodiversity gain condition. The request to use the de minimis exemption is considered reasonable as the planned works will be temporary and the existing conditions will be reinstated following replacement of the boardwalk. Under these circumstances there is a reasonable case for applying to use the de minimis exemption. The rationale is that there is no need to apply a loss if baseline habitat type and condition can be returned within two years. This is considered achievable.
- 3.5. It follows, therefore, that there will be no impacts to priority habitat and that there will be no impact to more than 25m² of area habitat (that has a baseline greater than zero) or more than 5m of linear habitat.

BA Landscape

- 3.6. No objection to the proposal. If approval is given, please could the selection of material be conditioned to secure the product and colour as shown in the application.

BA Heritage and Design Manager

- 3.7. Although timber would be preferable, as it would weather-down and look more recessive in this natural environment, photographs of the previous installation in recycled plastic at How Hill have been provided and it is evident that the proposed colour does appear a brown/grey colour which is not dissimilar to the timber. Given that the proposed footpath is not particularly prominent in the wider landscape but is largely overhung by ferns, reeds and other vegetation, and set primarily within an enclosed wet woodland, in this instance there are no objections to the proposal.

4. Representations

- 4.1. None received.

5. Policies

- 5.1. The adopted development plan policies for the area are set out in the [Local Plan for the Broads](#) (adopted 2019).
- 5.2. The following policies were used in the determination of the application:
- DM11 - Heritage Assets
 - DM13 – Natural Environment
 - DM16 – Development & Landscape
 - DM43 - Design

6. Assessment

- 6.1. The application seeks to replace an existing wooden boardwalk with a recycled plastic material and replace the existing pedestrian bridge with a new, like for like, timber replacement with recycled plastic boards. The replacements will be in the same position on the nature trail.

Principle of development

- 6.2. The nature trail at How Hill is open annually from Easter to the end of October and provides access to the National Nature Reserve for the general public. The Broads Authority has a responsibility to ensure that access to the public is available. Both the bridge and the boardwalk are nearing the end of their serviceable life and are now due for replacement. The principle of the development is therefore acceptable.

Impact on the landscape

- 6.3. It is proposed to replace the existing wooden boardwalk with a recycled plastic material that has been used elsewhere within the Broads Area including more recently at How Hill as approved under application reference BA/2021/0472/FUL.
- 6.4. In considering the principle of replacing a traditional material such as timber with a recycled/composite plastic material, this is typically resisted throughout the Broads due to circumstances relating to a building, the visibility of the material, or a specific character of an area. Each proposal is considered on a case-by-case basis and, subject to details, the change of material may be acceptable in some cases.
- 6.5. In this instance, the area is very natural however, timber does have a limited lifespan, and the Broads Authority recognises that the overall quality of plastic/recycled materials has improved in recent years with some of the products achieving a relatively natural finish. It is also recognised there are benefits of using recycled plastic for a boardwalk, including its inherent non-slip properties, removing the need for chicken wire or any other type of additional design requirements. The proposed recycled plastic is a dark coloured material and would be replacing an unsightly, damaged and dangerous boardwalk. In addition, with no need for treatment, unlike tanalised timber, there is no risk of leaching into the surrounding environment. Subject to a high-quality product being used the plastic will, over time, weather to a natural finish comparable to timber and as it is in an enclosed area and sited horizontally there will be no adverse visual impact on the surrounding landscape.
- 6.6. The proposed bridge will be replaced with a mix of timber for the upper supports and handrail, which would be more visible in the landscape, with recycled plastic boards to match those on the replaced boardwalk thereby providing a similar structure to the existing bridge. There is no objection from either the Landscape Architect or the Heritage and Design Manager to the replacements, the proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of Policies DM11, DM16 and DM43.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.7. The information submitted with the application has been assessed by the Broads Authority's BNG Consultant, who advises that the use of the de minimis exemption is reasonable as the planned works will be temporary and the existing conditions will be reinstated following replacement of the boardwalk.
- 6.8. It is therefore concluded that the proposal is acceptable in meeting the requirements of The Environment Act 2021 and Policy DM13 with regard to BNG.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The proposals will allow for improved and safer access along the nature trail around How Hill. The proposed change in materials will reduce the need for continued replacement in the longer term and is considered to be acceptable regarding the

impact on the character of the area in this case. It is therefore recommended that planning permission is approved subject to conditions.

8. Recommendation

8.1. Approve subject to the following conditions:

- Time Limit
- In accordance with the submitted documents and plans.
- Constructed in accordance with the agreed material schedule or requirement to submit details of material if they differ due to supply issues.

9. Reason for recommendation

9.1. Subject to the conditions outlined above, the application is considered to be in accordance with Policies DM11, DM13, DM16 and DM43 of the Local Plan for the Broads 2019.

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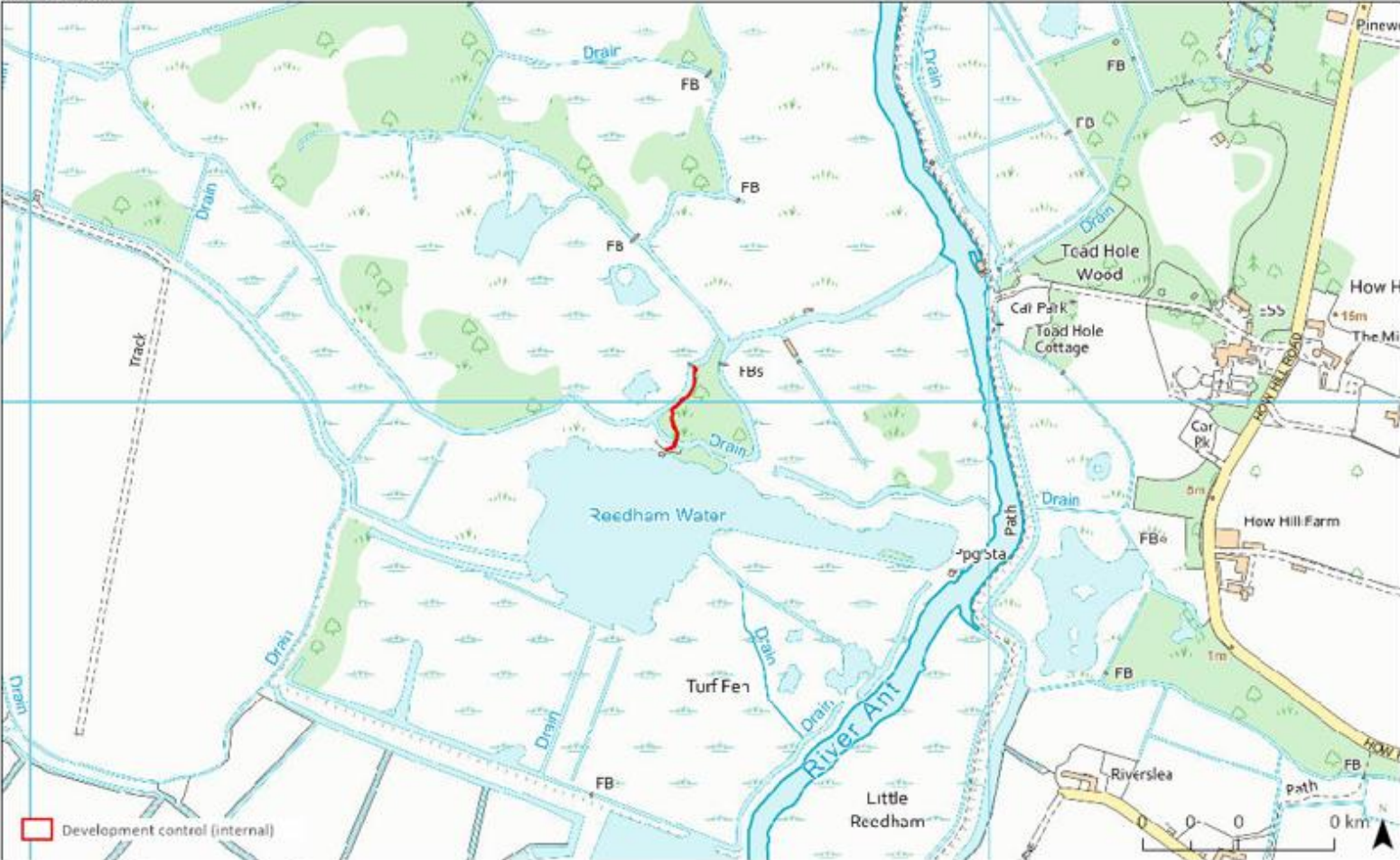
Appendix 1 – [Location map](#)

Appendix 1 – Location map

BA/2025/0287/FUL -How Hill Nature Reserve, How Hill, Ludham



Scale: 1:5,000



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