

Planning Committee

06 December 2024

Agenda item number 7.1

BA/2024/0245/FUL- Carlton Marshes Visitors Centre, Burnt Hill Lane, Carlton Colville

Report by Assistant Planning Officer

Proposal

Installation of 3 no. electric cycle charging boxes

Applicant

Broads Authority

Recommendation

Approve subject to Conditions

Reason for referral to committee

Broads Authority development

Application target date

13 December 2024

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1. Description of site and proposals

- 1.1. The visitor centre and car park serve the Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve, which is located to the north of the centre. Carlton Marshes lies within the Waveney Valley at the southern edge of the Norfolk Broads and forms part of the Suffolk Broads. The reserve is a rich mosaic of habitats, including grazing marshes, fens, peat pools, short fen meadow, tall fen (referred to as 'tall litter fen'), dykes, pools, and scrub. These habitats, mostly man-made, have evolved through centuries of traditional land management and are now home to a diverse range of specialized wildlife.
- 1.2. In 2019, the National Lottery Heritage Fund contributed over £4 million to the vision of expanding the reserve, which aims to create 1,000 acres of wildland. This funding was matched by donations from Suffolk Wildlife Trust supporters and donors. The visitor centre and its associated facilities are an integral part of this ongoing conservation effort, which is focused on preserving and enhancing the natural heritage of the area.
- 1.3. The site is an area of land located on the existing car park that serves the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre. The area to the north of the car park currently contains a timber-clad enclosure, while the southern area is an open grassland, positioned immediately to the west of the access driveway leading from the public highway to the car park. The site is situated at the northern end of Burnt Hill Lane, on the west side of the road, with residential properties located to the east.

2. Site history

- 2.1. BA/1986/6061/HISTAP - Conversion of barn for field study centre – Approved
- 2.2. BA/1992/5256/HISTAP - Non-illuminated information panel – Approved
- 2.3. BA/1996/6065/HISTAP - Single storey extension and alterations- Refused
- 2.4. BA/1996/6067/HISTAP - Alterations and extension to visitors' centre – Approved
- 2.5. BA/1999/5257/HISTAP - Non-illuminated hanging sign – Approved
- 2.6. BA/2008/0179/FUL - Construction of an easy access path on an existing public footpath to complete an easy access route linking the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve at Carlton Marshes to Nicholas Everitt Park at Oulton Broad - Approved

- 2.7. BA/2008/0303/FUL - Installation of a Solar panel (hot water, solar thermal) – Approved
- 2.8. BA/2011/0335/FUL - Installation of roof mounted solar PV - Approved
- 2.9. BA/2017/0405/FUL - Visitor centre building with viewing deck and outdoor play area, including a shop and cafe, and short-term living accommodation for interns working with the Trust. Parking area with access from Burnt Hill Lane. Change of use of education centre to dwelling and conversion of car park to part domestic garden and carparking associated with new dwelling, remainder reverting to agricultural land. – Approved

3. Consultations received

Parish Council

- 3.1. No response received.

BA Landscape Officer

- 3.2. Good consideration has been given to the location of the charge points within the existing carpark. They support a sustainable alternative to cars. The palette states ‘dark brown wood grain finish’. The colour is suitable to match the existing visitor centre. I would like further information on the composite material used for the walls, in terms of quality and sustainability. For example, natural wood would be preferable; sustainable, recycled materials would be a reasonable alternative. UPVC would not be a suitable material due to issues of sustainability and appearance. Otherwise, no objections from a landscape perspective.

BA Historic Environment Manager

- 3.3. While the principle is supported, I require some clarification in order to comment fully. I have taken a look through the application, and we will need a bit more information to clarify exactly where they will be positioned. We have a photograph but a plan showing its location and orientation, or alternatively a marked-up photo, preferably to scale or with a tape measure / string showing the dimensions. We also have a plan showing ‘dimensions of a power pod’, which I understand to be a single charging station. It is stated on the application form that there will be three together to make a single construction. Please could we have information to show this configuration. We need to be sure exactly what is proposed. I would also re-iterate the Landscape Officer's comments on the cladding proposed - a timber to match the existing cladding on the main building would be preferred.
- 3.4. Further to our site visits at Salhouse Broad and Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre I can confirm the following: In order to fully understand the proposal and its context it would be useful to have more background information to the project. Our preference would still be for timber cladding, which would give a higher quality finish and help the ‘pods’ to blend into the landscape. If this is not possible due to security of the units, the mid brown colour for Carlton Marshes would on balance be acceptable and the dark brown-black colour acceptable for Salhouse. It would be useful to have some more information

on the design and why the pods have been designed as they have. There are concerns regarding the size of the units, in particular the width at 2.7m and the height at 1.6m, which will make the units very large and prominent – particularly at the Carlton Marshes site. Is there any scope to reduce these dimensions? In particular the 1.6m height is taller than most bikes but not tall enough for users to enter and so it would be useful to know why the unit needs to be that tall. Could the width be reduced by reducing the number of charging points? Can we have information on the black frame? What material will that be? How will the structure and charging point be maintained? Will this be on an ongoing basis? One of the images provided shows the ‘Power pod with sign placement’. Will there be a sign on the door and what will the design of this sign be and what material will it be made from? Will the door of each pod (e.g. all 3) have a sign?

- 3.5. In terms of the material, I agree with the Landscape Officer and the Heritage Planning Officer that a natural timber cladding to the pods would be preferable. However, I appreciate the points made by the applicant regarding security, given the use of the pods. I think it is also the case that as a non-traditional structure a composite would in principle be more acceptable. The proposed composite cladding is made from wood and recycled material which is positive. I understand the mid-brown sample is proposed for this location in order to match as closely as possible the brown timber cladding on the visitor centre. I do have some concerns regarding the visual appearance of this sample. Although I would normally encourage consistency, in this instance the ‘wood effect’ pattern on the mid-brown sample is unrealistic and as such I would suggest that the darker colour be used. Although it will not match the visitor centre as closely in colour, the darker colour has a better finish and should also mean it is more visually recessive.
- 3.6. No objection to the amended plans.

Suffolk County Council Highways

- 3.7. Notice is hereby given that the County Council as Highways Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of permission due to the application not having a detrimental effect on the adopted highway.

4. Representations

- 4.1. Broads Society – supports.

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

- DM15 – Renewable Energy
- DM16 – Development & Landscape
- DM21 – Amenity
- DM29 – Sustainable tourism and recreation development
- DM43 – Design

6. Assessment

- 6.1. The main issues to be considered include the principle of the development, the impacts on neighbouring amenity, the landscape and the design of the proposed development. This report will also include an assessment of the potential tourism and recreation improvements, along with the renewable energy benefits.

Principle of development

- 6.2. The installation of electric bike charging pods aligns with the Broads Authority's commitment to promoting sustainable transport options and reducing carbon emissions in the region. Given the increase in the use of electric cycles, particularly on rural routes within the Broads, the provision of these charging facilities supports an evolving industry that encourages environmentally friendly travel alternatives.
- 6.3. The Local Plan places an emphasis on enhancing sustainable infrastructure that minimises ecological impact while promoting tourism and accessibility within the area. The charging pods would enable cyclists to extend their journeys, thereby increasing accessibility to the Broads' natural and cultural attractions, without reliance on motor vehicles. This provision aligns with the Authority's sustainability objectives by reducing fossil fuel dependency and supporting eco-tourism initiatives.
- 6.4. Furthermore, the installation of electric bike charging pods is consistent with policies that encourage alternative modes of transportation, particularly those that are low in environmental impact. By enabling longer journeys, these facilities contribute to the region's sustainable tourism objectives and provide additional utility for both residents and visitors. The principle of this development is therefore considered acceptable.

Design and Heritage Assets

- 6.5. Policy DM43 states that all development will be expected to be of a high design quality and should integrate effectively with its surroundings, reinforce local distinctiveness, and landscape character and preserve or enhance cultural heritage. Policy SP5 states that the historic environment of the Broads will be protected and enhanced. Policy DM11 continues this and states that all development will be expected to protect, preserve, or enhance the significance and setting of historic, cultural and architectural heritage assets and elements of the wider historic environment that give the Broads its distinctive character. The pods themselves are reasonably large in size, and this is for a practical purpose to allow an electric cycle inside and remain locked up and safe.

- 6.6. The material pallet has been reviewed in detail to ensure it is appropriate. Originally, it was requested that the cladding material be natural timber; to retain a soft, natural appearance. Following this request, a fire safety test was carried out and details of this were provided. There are numerous reports of electric cycles catching fire during charging, the structural components of the pods must therefore be able to withstand a fire if this was to occur. The fire safety results demonstrated that the plastic mock timber cladding was able to contain fire significantly more than timber cladding. The timber cladding could catch fire and potentially cause the fire to spread. The plastic cladding is non-flammable, meaning that the fire would not spread beyond the unit. Whilst the plastic mock timber cladding does not retain the natural, soft appearance of genuine timber, the benefits of fire safety outweigh the harmful impacts caused by the plastic cladding and the material has been considered acceptable.
- 6.7. The cladding is proposed in a brown colour to match the cladding on the visitor centre and, after discussion of other colours on site it is considered unacceptable.
- 6.8. The roof of the pods is to be a slight curved solar panel, and this will provide additional power to the running of the pod. This will improve the environmental credentials of the pods and reduce the carbon footprint of the pod. This is a modern design element, however as the units are functional units, it is considered appropriate in this case. The pods will be placed on a type 1 surface and fixed into the ground. There will be a door using the same materials on the front that can be locked to keep the bike safe inside whilst charging.
- 6.9. The location has been reviewed throughout the application process. The proposed location was next to the existing cycle racks however, as you enter the car park, you would see the pods and this location would interfere with the view of the centre. Following consultation with the manager of Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre, a revised location was agreed, on the north-west side of the carpark, next to the existing timber clad shipping container. In this location the pods read as part of the existing works area and do not impact on the views of the centre. The Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre is a non-designated heritage asset which means that it needs to be protected. The pods are a modern form of development however, they are some distance from the centre. Following this amendment, it is not considered that the pods will have a negative impact on the heritage asset and is considered acceptable in terms of Policy DM43 and Policy DM11.

Amenity

- 6.10. Policy DM21 requires that all new development must ensure a satisfactory level of amenity for occupiers and users. In addition, development will not be permitted if it would result in an unacceptable impact on the amenity of existing or future neighbouring properties or uses. In this case, the proposed pods are situated in a corner of the car park, screened by a timber clad shipping container, and an earth bank with a back drop of trees. While the pods will be visible from the road and the public car park, they are at a sufficient distance to mitigate visual impact. The proximity of

adjacent footpaths also ensures safe, convenient access to the pods. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to comply with Policy DM21 – Amenity.

Renewable Energy

- 6.11. Policy DM15 supports renewable energy technology. The proposed cycle charging pods are minor in scale compared to traditional renewable energy developments like solar farms or wind turbines. Located within the car park, they align with the policy's preference for utilising previously developed sites. This location minimises the visual impact on the distinctive landscape and preserves the recreational experience of the Broads. The pods will not require extensive ancillary infrastructure like power lines or storage buildings, which the policy stipulates should be evaluated in proposals. Since these pods are compact and do not interfere with sensitive biodiversity areas or cultural heritage, they do not compromise the Broads' environmental or visual character. Given the pods' scale and location, they meet the intentions of DM15 by supporting renewable energy infrastructure without altering the landscape's distinctive qualities.

Sustainable Tourism and Recreation Development

- 6.12. Policy DM29 deals with sustainable tourism and recreation development, and consideration must be given to both the locational and design principles laid out in the policy. The proposed pods are sited within an existing car park associated with a visitor attraction. This aligns with criterion (ii) of the policy, which supports development that is closely associated with existing visitor sites. Additionally, the pods offer sustainable access, being specifically intended to support cyclists, which aligns with the policy's requirement that developments be accessible by sustainable means of transport. The charging pods meet several key principles for sustainable development: Given the compact size of the pods and their siting within an established car park, they are unlikely to create significant additional demand on the highway network. There is also sufficient existing parking for both cars and cycles, meeting criteria (vi) and (vii).
- 6.13. The placement of the pods does not impact dark skies, as they do not include bright lighting, and they are carefully sited to avoid harm to the landscape character or local wildlife habitats. By supporting eco-friendly transportation, the pods also contribute positively to the area's environmental quality, aligning with criterion (viii).
- 6.14. The design and scale of the pods are appropriate to their setting, aligning with criterion (ix). They are small, non-intrusive structures that do not affect navigation or the open nature of the surrounding landscape, meeting the requirement for compatibility with local character.
- 6.15. The installation of the pods is compatible with the objectives and detailed requirements of Policy DM29. Their location within an existing car park and their support for sustainable tourism enhance accessibility for cyclists without detracting from the unique qualities of the Broads landscape.

Landscape

- 6.16. The proposed pods are small in scale, appropriately sited within a car park bordered by a shipping container clad in timber, and an earth bank. This layout effectively conserves the local landscape, as the pods are positioned to minimize visibility from surrounding areas, preserving the overall visual experience and the traditional, open character of the Broads landscape. Additionally, the car park is a public space where traffic and cyclists moving are a common sight. The Broads Authority Landscape Officer raised no objections to the proposals and it is considered that the application is acceptable in terms of Policy DM16 – Development and Landscape.

Other issues

- 6.17. The installation of electric cycle charging pods represents a positive step forward in supporting sustainable transportation options within the Broads. As an evolving industry, electric cycle charging infrastructure is becoming increasingly important for promoting eco-friendly travel. Intelligen has outlined plans to expand this network, installing additional charging pods in sites across the Broads network and beyond, which would enhance accessibility for cyclists and encourage a shift toward greener forms of transport in the area. The installation of these pods in the current location is a sensible and forward-thinking measure that aligns with the Authority's sustainable tourism objectives and broader environmental goals. Given this context, the installation of these pods is considered acceptable.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. In conclusion, the proposed electric cycle charging pods have been assessed against policies DM15 (Renewable Energy), DM16 (Landscape), DM21 (Amenity), and DM43 (Design). The pods are strategically located within an existing car park. This siting minimises their impact on both the landscape and visual amenity, ensuring compatibility with the key landscape characteristics of the Broads as outlined in Policy DM16. The design is in keeping with the area's character, meeting the high-quality design expectations set out in Policy DM43 and ensuring the development respects the traditional features of the landscape.
- 7.2. The sustainable nature of the pods supports the broader environmental goals of the Broads Local Plan, contributing positively to tourism infrastructure while encouraging eco-friendly transport options. The proposals are therefore considered acceptable.

8. Recommendation

8.1. Approved subject to conditions:

1. Three Year timeframe for commencement
2. In accordance with the approved plans and material details
3. Prior to installation, all external materials to be confirmed

9. Reason for recommendation

- 9.1. The placement of three electric cycle charging pods in the north-west corner of the Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre carpark is in accordance with NPPF guidance and Policy DM11, DM15, DM16, DM21, DM29, DM43 of the Local Plan for the Broads and is considered acceptable.

Author: Callum Sculfor

Date of report: 01 November 2024

Appendix 1 – [Location map](#)

Appendix 1 – Location map

BA/2024/0245/FUL - Carlton Marshes Visitors Centre, Burnt Hill, Carlton Colville



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