



PLANNING COMMITTEE: 7 September 2023

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources

Contact for further information:

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SUBJECT: PLANNING APPLICATION REF: 2023/0231/FUL

PROPOSAL: Erection of thatched timber Viking longhouse and approach boardwalk

APPLICANT: The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

ADDRESS: Martin Mere, Fish Lane, Burscough, Ormskirk, Lancashire L40 0TA

REASON FOR CALL IN: Application has been called in by Cllr Gordon to consider drainage and amenities

Wards affected: Scarisbrick

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Planning Committee on an application which seeks to secure planning permission for the removal of an existing roundhouse within the 'living history' element of the Martin Mere Visitor Centre. The roundhouse will be replaced by a Viking longhouse which will first be finished in timber to make it waterproof but will eventually be formed of wattle and daub which the remaining roundhouses are all constructed of. Additionally, a boardwalk will be provided to allow access to the longhouse.
- 1.2 It is considered that subject to planning conditions, the proposed development is acceptable in terms of design, access, landscaping, layout and scale and amenity. The proposed development is compliant with the NPPF and Local Plan in respect of drainage, reuse of land and other relevant matters.
- 1.3 Delegated powers are requested for the approval of the scheme subject to ongoing discussions with Natural England regarding a Habitats Regulation Assessment being successfully concluded.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION TO PLANNING COMMITTEE

2.1 To grant planning permission subject to conditions (delegated powers following conclusion of matters regarding the HRA with Natural England)

3.0 THE SITE

- 3.1 The site relates to an area within the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) Martin Mere, in Burscough. The site is accessed via walkways within the Visitor Centre from the main access off Fish Lane.
- 3.2 The site is within a wetland area and as such forms part of a flood plain. It is located to the northwest of the town of Burscough and the Southwest of Rufford.
- 3.3 The site is part of the current learning area of the 'village' which is used during term time to explain the significance of wetlands and the history of the area.
- 3.4 A roundhouse currently sits on the site, this has fallen into disrepair and will be removed as part of this application.

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposed development comprises the construction of a thatched, initially timber but changing over time to wattle and daub, Viking style longhouse. It will also provide a new boardwalk to the longhouse and an existing roundhouse will be removed.
- 4.2 The walls of the longhouse will be constructed by driving timber posts into the ground and it measures approximately 8m x 3.5m.

5.0 PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

- 5.1 2022/0580/FUL – Thatched timber Viking longhouse and removal of 13 trees. REFUSED on 13 July 2022

6.0 OBSERVATION OF CONSULTEES

- 6.1 Environment Agency (16.05.23) – the building is classified as water compatible and there is no objection to the proposal.
- 6.2 WLBC Drainage (22.05.23) – requested copy of warning and evacuation plan for completeness. This has been provided and confirmation received on 23.06.23 from Drainage Officer that there is no objection to the proposal
- 6.3 MEAS (23.05.23) – noted that data was included from NBN Atlas which was requested to be removed due to a limitation on commercial use. Requested conditions in relation to provision of bat boxes, a Construction Environmental Management Plan, bird nesting boxes and considered that a Habitats Regulations Assessment was not required.
Further response – confirming no objection (19.06.2023)

Letter confirming HRA not required (26.07.2023)

- 6.4 Natural England (21.06.23) – responded requiring a Habitats Regulation Assessment, reconsulted on MEAS response responded further (10.08.23) that Habitat Regulations Assessment required – Discussions ongoing.

7.0 OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

- 7.1 Burscough Parish Council (24.05.23): appreciate that previous comments have been taken into consideration but concerned over works undertaken to trees. Raise concerns in relation to noise which relates to the site.
- 7.2 One letter of objection has been raised by a neighbouring resident who objects to the following:
- Removal of the trees
 - Concern over the flood risk assessment as it does not consider properties on Fish Lane and does not consider that some ditches have previously been removed
 - The impact on increase in traffic should be taken into account, it is noted that there have been other developments in the area which have changed the level of traffic using Fish Lane
 - The potential for an increase in noise levels (the children's play area is referenced as an area where school children may be allowed to play)

8.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 8.1 Preliminary Ecological Survey (CCNW) (updated 31.05.23)
- 8.2 Flood Risk Assessment (Rutter Johnson)
- 8.3 Design and Access Statement (WWT)
- 8.4 Bat Survey Report (CCNW)
- 8.5 Planning Statement (WWT)
- 8.6 Drainage Statement (Rutter Johnson)
- 8.7 Evacuation Plan
- 8.8 Construction Environmental Management Plan (WWT)

9.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 9.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPG), the West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027) and the Burscough Neighbourhood Plan provide the policy framework against which the development will be assessed.
- 9.2 The site is within the Green Belt as designated in the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027.

9.3 Relevant West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 policies:

SP1 - Sustainable Development Framework for West Lancashire
GN3 – Criteria for Sustainable Development
EN2 – Preserving and Enhancing West Lancashire's Natural Environment

9.4 Relevant Burscough Parish Neighbourhood Plan policies:

BPD1 – Design and Accessibility Principles
BPVE1 – Visitor Economy

9.5 Supplementary Planning Documents

Design Guide (June 2008)
Green Belt (October 2015)

10.0 OBSERVATIONS OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY

10.1 The main considerations for this application are:

1. The principle/Impact on the Green Belt
2. Impact on Ecology
3. Impact on flood and drainage issues
4. Design and visual appearance
5. Highways
6. Residential Amenity

Principle of Development/Impact on the Green Belt

10.2 The West Lancashire Local Plan, Policy GN1, states that development proposals within the Green Belt will be assessed against national policy and any relevant local plan policies.

10.3 In terms of construction of the longhouse, paragraph 149 of the NPPF is a relevant consideration and states that local planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt as inappropriate. There are a number of exceptions within the paragraph which include: the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial rounds and allotments, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. It is considered that the development represents the provision of appropriate facilities in connection with the existing use of land for outdoor recreation and therefore represents appropriate development within the Green Belt.

10.4 In relation to the boardwalk, paragraph 150 of the NPPF is relevant which states that engineering operations within the Green Belt are appropriate provided that they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purpose of including land within the Green Belt.

- 10.5 The application site is identified as a major tourism destination in West Lancashire. It is one of nine specialist wetland centres run by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust across the country and plays a significant role in regards to the visitor economy of West Lancashire.
- 10.6 The proposed development will take place within the confines of the existing 'village' within Martin Mere. It will result in the replacement of one roundhouse with a Viking longhouse to improve the ability to tell the story of such settlements within the area to groups of school children.
- 10.7 As the development would be used for outdoor sport and recreation, it is considered that the proposal is appropriate within the larger site and the development is therefore considered acceptable in principle in compliance with Policy GN1 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027, BPVE1 of the Burscough Parish Neighbourhood Plan and paragraphs 149 and 150 of the NPPF.

Impact on Ecology

- 10.8 Policy EN2 of the West Lancashire Local Plan states that where there is reason to suspect that there may be a priority species, or their habitat, on or close to a proposed development site, planning applications should be accompanied by a survey assessing the presence of such species and, where appropriate, making provision for their needs.
- 10.9 Natural England and MEAS have been consulted on the application. Natural England have requested that a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) be carried out whilst MEAS consider that such is not required due to a lack of direct impacts to the designated site. This issue has also been raised by the objector to the proposals.
- 10.10 Discussions are ongoing in this regard. MEAS have confirmed that they do not consider a HRA to be necessary, the comments of Natural England are awaited in this regard. It is considered that this element can be resolved pending further information. The development is approximately 100m from the Martin Mere Special Area of Protection (SPA) and the Martin Mere Ramsar Site. These are protected habitats. Following discussions, a HRA has now been provided to Natural England and their comments are awaited. The HRA does not identify any likely significant effects to either European site, those issues considered include:
- Habitat loss (including functionally linked land);
 - Noise and Visual Disturbance (both during construction and operation); and
 - Transfer of construction related pollutants.
- 10.11 The application is supported by a Construction Environmental Management Plan, an Ecological Survey and a Bat Survey. The impacts can be appropriately mitigated by conditions which are proposed to be included within any decision.
- 10.12 It is considered that, pending the final comments of Natural England in relation to the HRA, the development is in accordance with Policy EN2 of the West Lancashire Local Plan.

Impact on Flooding and Drainage

- 10.13 West Lancashire Local Plan policy GN3 requires that acceptable drainage provision is made for developments. The site is within Flood Zone 3 therefore the Environment Agency have been notified and made comments in relation to the proposed works.
- 10.14 Both the Environment Agency and the Drainage Officer have confirmed that there are no objections to the proposal. A copy of the evacuation plan was provided and this has been confirmed as acceptable.
- 10.15 Representations have been received in relation to past drainage works which it is understood have been undertaken by the WWT in relation to Martin Mere. There are no works, other than those to facilitate the proposed Viking longhouse and boardwalk. These have been confirmed as being acceptable. It is considered therefore that the proposal meets Policy GN3 in relation to acceptable drainage provision.

Design and Visual Appearance

- 10.16 Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan together with the Design Guide SPD is relevant to the assessment of the design and external appearance of the development and requires that development should be of a scale, mass and built form which responds to the characteristics of the site and its surroundings. This is supported by policy BPD1 of the Burscough Parish Neighbourhood Plan in relation to design and accessibility.
- 10.16 The location of the proposed Viking longhouse is in an area which is influenced by the existing roundhouses and education area. This is situated to the rear of the Reserve and is not visible within the wider landscape. A Public Right of Way runs in the vicinity of the works and it is possible that glimpses could be caught from this location. However, the natural materials of the proposed longhouse would ensure that it would be recessed into the background.
- 10.17 It is considered that the proposal is in accordance with Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan and the Council's SPD.

Highways

- 10.18 Policy GN3 requires that developments provide adequate parking. The proposed longhouse does not introduce a new feature into the Reserve but replaces an existing feature within the existing education facility.
- 10.19 Comments have been received in relation to the impacts of the Reserve on the surrounding highway network and other developments which have taken place in the area. Again, the replacement of the roundhouse with a Viking longhouse is the only consideration in the determination of this application. It is not considered that the replacement with one type of historical replica with another would have any impacts on the overall levels of traffic which access the Martin Mere site or the wider highway network.

10.20 It is not considered that the replacement of the existing roundhouse with a longhouse would have an impact on the levels of car parking required or the local highway network and as such it is considered that the proposal meets the requirements of Policy GN3 in regard to highways.

Residential Amenity

10.21 Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan requires that new development 'retain or create reasonable levels of privacy, amenity and sufficient garden/outdoor space for occupiers of the proposed and neighbouring properties'.

10.22 The proposal does not introduce any new works but replaces an existing facility within the wider Martin Mere site. Comments have been received in relation to existing levels of noise which neighbouring properties are subject to, particularly in relation to the children's play area which is situated to the front of the wider site. This is not a matter for this application. Comments are also made in regards to the tannoy announcements regarding feeding demonstrations etc. Again, this is not a matter for this application which deals with the consideration of replacing the roundhouse with the longhouse only and not the wider elements of the Martin Mere attraction.

10.23 The application replaces a facility within a facility which is already operating and does not introduce any new uses into the Martin Mere facility. It is considered that on this basis there would be no unacceptable impacts on residential amenity from the proposed Viking longhouse.

11.0 CONCLUSION

11.1 The replacement of the existing roundhouse with the Viking longhouse and boardwalk will ensure that the education facility of the Martin Mere site continues in a manner which provides a wide range of understanding of the local area for visiting school children. It replaces one type of structure with another which will have limited impacts on the landscape and is not considered to raise any objection from statutory consultees in regard to flooding and drainage.

11.2 The comments from neighbours are noted, however, these are considered to be relevant to the wider Martin Mere site and issues in that regard, not the application which is being considered. The application itself is considered to have no demonstrable impacts beyond those already related to the roundhouse which is being replaced.

11.3 The application is considered to be in accordance with the relevant policies of the NPPF, the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 and the Burscough Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

12.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:

1. The development must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the details shown on the following plans:

Site Location Plan Drawing No MM/SR/LH08

Mere Tun Access Plan

Mere Tun Dock Drawing No LH14

School Access Bridge Sheet 1 Drawing No LH09A Rev 03

School Access Bridge Sheet 2 Drawing No LH06B Rev 03

Roof Detail Sheet 1 of 2 Drawing No LH03 Rev 05

Roof Detail Sheet 2 of 2 Drawing No LH03B

Longhouse Wall Detail Drawing No LH04 Rev 04

Boardwalk Detail Drawing No LH10

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure compliance with the provisions of Policy GN3 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027.

3. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in strict accordance with the Flood Risk Assessment (Rutter Johnson Constructing Civil and Structural Engineers) dated August 2022.

Reason: In order to ensure flood risk mitigation measures are implemented to comply with the requirements of Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027.

4. The building shall not be brought into use until details and location of bird nesting boxes and a bat box to be incorporated into the scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The bird and bat box shall be installed in accordance with the approved details prior to the first occupation of the dwellings and shall be retained at all times thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity conservation and to comply with Policies GN3 & EN2 in the adopted West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document.

5. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the details provided in the Construction Method Statement provided on 31st May 2023.

Reason: To safeguard protected species and to ensure that the development complies with the provisions of Policy EN2 of the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027.

13.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder.

14.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no significant financial or resource implications arising from this report.

15.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

15.1 The actions referred to in this report are covered by the scheme of delegation to officers and any necessary changes have been made in the relevant risk registers.

16.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Background Documents

In accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 the background papers used in the compilation of reports relating to planning applications are listed within the text of each report and are available for inspection in the Planning Division, except for such documents as contain exempt or confidential information defined in Schedule 12A of the Act.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Human Rights

The relevant provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights have been taken into account in the preparation of this report, particularly the implications arising from Article 8 (the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence) and Article 1 of Protocol 1 (the right of peaceful enjoyment of possessions and protection of property).

Appendices

None.