

Minutes of a site meeting held on **Monday, 15 July 2019 at 10.00am**
at Bawdsey Manor, Bawdsey, IP12 3BH.

Committee Members Present:

Councillors Debbie McCallum (Chairman), Tony Fryatt (Vice-Chairman), Melissa Allen, Stuart Bird, Chris Blundell, Tony Cooper, Michael Deacon, Colin Hedgley, Kay Yule

Apologies Given:

Liz Beighton (Planning Development Manager)

Officers Present:

Michaëlle Coupe (Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management), Katherine Scott (Development Management Team Leader South)

Others in Attendance:

Mr Andrew Block (Chairman, Bawdsey Parish Council)
Mr Ashley Jones (General Manager, PGL)
Councillor James Mallinder (Ward Member)
Residents from Bawdsey

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the site meeting and reminded those present that the purpose of the meeting was a 'fact finding' exercise only and to provide Members with an opportunity to view the site and its surroundings.

The meeting began in the Leaders' Lounge within the Manor House. A brief overview of the Planning Application was given by the Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer.

The application sought planning permission to provide a lake within the grounds of Bawdsey Manor Estate for use by the applicant (PGL) who ran a children's outdoor activity/educational centre on the site. The lake would provide opportunities for canoeing and raft building by guests. The material excavated for the lake was proposed be re-used on the estate. It was also proposed to re-position activity equipment previously consented within the grounds, in response to concerns raised by neighbours.

The application was due to be determined at the meeting of the Planning Committee South scheduled for Tuesday 23 July 2019 and had been referred to that Committee because of the sensitive nature of the site, the finely balanced nature of the recommendation, and the level of public interest.

The site was a late Victorian/Edwardian country estate, overlaid with mid-twentieth military structures; the latter being of particular significance because of the role Bawdsey played in the development of radar technology. Following the departure of the RAF from the site in the 1990s, the site was used as an International School before being taken over by PGL in 2017.

As well as the grand mansion, a Grade II* listed building, at the centre of the site, there were a number of ancillary buildings and structures that were listed in their own right. This included the transmitter block (Grade II*) and the receiver block (Grade II). The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer also noted the terraces, formal gardens, and the extensive Pulhamite cliff garden and walk that were contained within the site.

The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer stated that PGL's occupation of the site prevented further piecemeal disposal of the site, that had occurred under previous owners. She highlighted the number of restoration works undertaken by PGL and its commitment to implementing the Conservation Management Plan completed in 2009, that had been funded by Historic England.

The proposed lake was considered by PGL to be an important component for its business, to maintain use of the site and preserve it. The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer noted the alternative location of the lawn for the lake proposed by objectors and Bawdsey Parish Council and referred to comments received from Historic England regarding the unsuitability of this location.

The meeting proceeded to a terrace immediately outside of the Leaders' Lounge, observing views across the site towards the extensive formal lawns at the front of the Manor House. The Committee's attention was also drawn to the restored 'River Jordan' which abutted the lawns. Mr Jones, the site's General Manager, confirmed that the area to the left of the lawns was a campfire base.

The meeting then proceeded to the lawns and towards the 'River Jordan'. It was shown the current raft-building arrangements on this stretch of the river. Views of the Gatehouse (used for staff accommodation), a nearby café, and several residential dwellings (two of which were owned by PGL) from the lawns were observed.

All present were also shown where vegetation had been removed to restore views of the historic driveway that led to the Manor House. The Chairman noted the proximity of the raft-building activities to residential dwellings.

An area of the river that was covered in duckweed was highlighted. Mr Jones detailed the excavation works that had been undertaken the previous winter; attempts had been made to remove the duckweed through non-invasive chemical treatment and physical removal. It was PGL's intention to introduce fish once the duckweed was removed. In response to a question from a member of the Committee, it was confirmed that the river's source was a pump from a nearby weir.

The meeting moved across the site via the road network, taking in views of the former military buildings on the site, which had been converted for use as accommodation for young people attending the site. Views of ancillary buildings that had been part of the original estate were also highlighted. Mr Jones highlighted nearby tents which were used as additional accommodation for young people.

The meeting continued to the activity structures on the site. It was noted that the zip wire had been installed with the departure and end points opposite to what had been granted in the original consent. Mr Jones highlighted the amendments proposed for activity structures previously consented but not yet installed, to address concerns raised by neighbouring residents whose boundaries were at close proximity to the activity structure area. When asked what the impact of these changes would be, he explained that it would move activities further away from these boundaries. He also highlighted that although the area had not housed activity structures when the site was used as an international school, it had been available for student activities.

Mr Jones stated that around 90% of the site's users were aged between 10 and 11 and that the average ratio of staff to young people was 1:10.

The meeting then moved to the area of the site that contained the accommodation tents. Mr Jones detailed that there were 52 tents over four “villages” and noted the nearby former military building that had been converted into a toilet/wash facility block. All the tents were pitched on concrete bases and were only operated between May and September; outside of these times they were taken down.

At this point, the Chairman asked how many people were employed on the site and if any local people were employed there. Mr Jones stated that the site currently employed over 100 people; 82 lived on the site and 23 were local people who commuted in from across the District.

The meeting was shown the interior of the tent facilities and the bedding arrangements within. It then proceeded to the location of the receiver block on the site. The block’s historical significance was highlighted, and Mr Jones detailed the poor condition it had been in when PGL took over the site. Work had been undertaken to cut back the overgrowth around the block and remove the detritus that had been left inside the block. It was noted that PGL were in discussions with Bawdsey Radar regarding use of the block.

All present then proceeded to the area of the site containing the climbing/abseil tower, which was in close proximity to the proposed site of the lake. Mr Jones detailed the proposed changes for the second abseil tower that had been consented but not yet constructed; these changes had been instigated following discussions with neighbouring properties close to this area of the site.

The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer drew the meeting’s attention to the area of land proposed for the construction of the lake. All present were shown the drawings contained within the planning application which detailed the proposed access to the site. She noted that a survey of the grazing marshland had been completed and the results of this needed to be analysed.

The Chairman sought confirmation that the operating times of any lake would be conditioned. The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer was able to provide this confirmation and advised that the site had been selected to minimise the view of the water. The proposed position of the lake had been moved so that it was further away from neighbouring dwellings, and the site was largely shielded from Ferry Road by existing vegetation.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, Mr Jones confirmed that the depth of the lake would be between 1 and 1.5 metres. The lake would have a shingle area for launching and the creation of habitats for local wildlife was highlighted.

Another member of the Committee asked if the risk of duckweed had been taken into consideration, given other cases of it on the site. Mr Jones said that it had been and that PGL intended to manage this from the start to ‘stay on top’ of the issue.

Councillor Mallinder, Ward Member for Bawdsey, queried what the proximity of activities would be to dwellings neighbouring the lake. Mr Jones said that activities would be programmed so that activities would be allocated last to sites on the lake nearest to neighbouring dwellings. The Senior Planning and Enforcement Officer advised that the maximum operating capacity for the site was 13 weeks a year.

The meeting then moved towards the east road approach and where orchard replanting was planned for. This area was also towards several of the dwellings that neighboured the application

site; Members observed the access road to the dwellings and the bin presentation that took place there. Mr Jones advised that this area of the estate was classified as a noise sensitive area.

The meeting then viewed the radar transmitter block. Mr Jones outlined how the excavated material would be re-used on site; topsoil would be for the reedbed areas within the lake and lake margins, and to form screen/noise attenuation mounds adjacent to the residential properties if required.

The material beneath would be redeposited in locations to the south of the lake to create a gentle gradient and to the east of the site to create grassland diversification, including on the area of the northern disused car park.

When moving back onto the PGL site and towards the walled garden area of the site, the Chairman asked what the maximum capacity was on the site. Mr Jones explained that, with all activity bases being used, the site could accommodate up to 1,000 people, however this maximum capacity was not currently achieved by the site. He stated that accommodation was a limiting factor in this and said that PGL did not intend to have all activity bases utilised at the same time.

In response to a question from Councillor Mallinder, Mr Jones advised that stays on the site were usually either Monday to Friday, or Friday to Sunday/Monday, with the former usually being utilised by school visits. During the summer, seven-night camps for individuals to book on to were available, with 70-80 individuals per camp.

The meeting viewed the walled garden, which contained archery and shooting activity bases. The state of the Lemonry was highlighted and Mr Jones outlined the restorations to this, and the walls of the gardens, that was proposed. It was also intended to restore the pathways through the walled garden. The views towards the stable block, garden cottage, and the Manor House, were also demonstrated.

The Head of Planning and Coastal Management left the meeting at this point (11.38am).

Mr Jones noted that overgrown vegetation had been cleared from around the Lemonry and that PGL would be placing information boards around the site to highlight the significant history of the buildings.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The site visit concluded at 11.40am.