

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the following:

*'Erection of new building to house activity hall adjacent to assault course plus 6No. covered driving range bays.'*

1.2 Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa is an established and well known leisure and recreational complex lying to the south west of Bicester town. The complex has been a major success for the local area creating numerous employment opportunities for local people (full and part time), both professional and manual. It caters for a wide variety of events including weddings and conferences although the main uses are predominantly recreational (i.e. golf, health & fitness and tennis). Its close proximity to a number of nationally important sporting and cultural locations such as Blenheim Palace, Oxford, the Cotswolds, Bicester Village and Silverstone, makes the site an extremely popular choice as a location to stay for tourists from the UK and abroad. Employment opportunities include green keeping staff, catering, bar staff, health and beauty and hotel staff. This application proposal for a new indoor activity hall to supplement the activities provided by the consented assault course. The building will house additional and related activities that the outdoor assault course cannot cater for such as wall bars, ropes, weight exercises etc whilst also providing covered space for assault course activities during inclement weather.

## 2 SITE HISTORY

2.1 Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa has been the subject of the following applications as set out below:

02/00182/F – Reapplication of a partially implemented permission CHS.344/90 to show the redesigned extension to the existing golf clubhouse including fitness gym, swimming pool, health and beauty suite, 52 bedrooms and ancillary service yard. Approved 17-05-2002.

03/01050/F – Reapplication of partially implemented permission CHS.344/90 to show redesigned extension to existing golf clubhouse inc. fitness gym, swimming pool, health and beauty suite, 52 No. bedrooms. Ancillary service yard, alterations to existing golf course and landscaping. Amendments to 02/00182/F. Approved 25-07-2003.

04/01290/F – Construction of 8No. three bed and 12No. two bed holiday two storey lodges. Refused 21-01-2005.

04/01399/F – Two storey extension to gold club and erection of stable office and golf cart store building. Approved 17-09-2004.

05/01327/F – Construction of 3No. three bed and 5No. two bed golf lodges. Refused 16-09-2005.

05/01542/F – Non-compliance with Condition 7 of planning permission 03/01050/F to allow occupation of the overnight accommodation by other than golf club members, their guests or members of visiting golf societies. Refused 16-09-2005.

09/01357/F – Removal of condition 7 of 03/01050/F. The overnight accommodation shall be occupied only be members of Bicester Golf and Country Club, their guests and members of visiting golf societies. Approved 22-12-2009.

10/01169/F – Relocation of service entrance to Bicester Golf and Country Club, erection of 1 No. dwelling and retention of existing farmhouse (amendment to 03/00609/F). Approved 01-12-2010.

10/00416/DISC – Discharge of conditions 7&8 of 10/01169/F. Approved 07-03-2011.

11/00157/F – Removal of condition 2 of 09/01357/F. Within two months of the date of this permission, a scheme for the traffic calming of nearby access routes shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed works shall be undertaken within a further six months in accordance with approved details. Approved 15-04-2011.

12/00054/DISC – Discharge of Condition 1 of 09/01357/F. Approved 27-04-2012.

12/01006/F – Erection of single storey extension and provision of new lake. Approved 30.10.12.

MW.0063/13 (Cherwell DC ref.13/00752/CM) Formation of 3m high bund – Approved 13-09-2013

13/01102/F – Two storey extension to existing hotel with roof accommodation to form 51 new bedrooms. Approved 04.10.2013.

13/01492/F – Change of use for the formation of an assault course. Approved 29.11.2013.

### 3 RELEVANT POLICIES

3.1 Relevant planning policy falls within the adopted Local Plan (1996) saved policies and Government Guidance. The Submission Local Plan has been through public consultation although it does not have Development Plan status.

#### i) **Cherwell Local Plan 1996 (Saved policies)**

3.2 Relevant policies include: C7 and C9.

3.3 Policy C7 is concerned with landscape conservation. The policy states that '**...development will not normally be permitted if it would cause demonstrable harm to the topography and character of the landscape**'.

3.4 Policy C9 deals with development beyond the planned limits of Banbury and Bicester. The policy states that development should not be of a '**...type, size or scale that is incompatible with a rural location....**'

#### ii) **National Planning Policy Framework**

3.5 **National Planning Policy Framework** - This guidance states at paragraph 14 that at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which should be seen as a 'golden thread' running through both plan-making and decision-taking. This includes at paragraph 7 three main dimensions including the economic role, social role and environmental role.

3.6 Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the Framework as a whole, or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted. In paragraph 17, twelve 'core planning principles' are outlined, including, '*always seek to secure high quality*

---

*design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings*'. Paragraph 17 also states mixed use developments should be promoted and that there should be encouragement to multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas.

- 3.7 Chapter 2 is concerned with town centres. Under the definition set out in annex 2, an indoor activity centre related to the assault course is not considered to constitute a 'main town centre use' and there is therefore not a requirement to apply the sequential test to this proposal.
- 3.8 Paragraph 28 states that planning policies should support economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity. This includes supporting well designed buildings and sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments.
- 3.9 Chapter 1 states that the Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity. It goes on to state *"planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system."* Local planning authorities should plan 'proactively' and meet the development needs of business.
- 3.10 Paragraph 56 concerns good design. It states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. Paragraph 58 states that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:
- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
  - Establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
  - Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development;

- Respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
- Create safe and accessible environments;
- Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

3.11 Paragraph 60 confirms that planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.

3.12 Chapter 8 is concerned with promoting healthy communities. Paragraph 70 states as follows:

*“To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and serve the community needs, planning policies should:*

- *Plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.”*

**iii) The Cherwell Local Plan (Submission 2014)**

3.13 The Council is currently consulting on modifications to the Submission Cherwell Local Plan. Policies can be afforded only limited weight but it is not yet part of the Development Plan. Relevant emerging policies include: SL3 (Supporting tourism growth sport and recreation provision) and BSC12 (Indoor sport, recreation and community facilities).

- 3.14 Policy SLE13 states that the Council will support proposals for new or improved tourism facilities in sustainable locations where they accord with other policies in the plan to increase overnight stays and visitor numbers in the District.
- 3.15 Policy BSC10 encourages the provision of open space, sport and recreation provision through enhancing existing provision, improving access to existing facilities or securing new provision
- 3.16 Policy BSC12 states that the Council will encourage the following:
- Protecting and enhancing the quality of existing facilities;
  - Improving access to existing facilities;
  - ensuring that development proposals contribute towards the provision of new or improved facilities where the development would generate a need for sport, recreation and community facilities.
- 3.17 The Hotel, Golf and Sport complex is also defined more generally within the document as an '**outdoor sports facilities**' and a '**visitor attraction**'.

---

## 4 THE PROPOSAL

4.1 The application proposal comprises of two elements:

- Covered building to house a new activity hall with ancillary changing facilities and meeting area;
- 6No. covered driving range bays to serve a re-orientated driving range.

4.2 The new covered activity hall provides for a total of 549m<sup>2</sup> of covered space on a single floor with ancillary changing facilities and a small assembly area. The activity centre is located next to the consented fitness zone and will be a related facility providing additional activities such as wall bars, ropes and weight exercises. The outdoor fitness zone provides different exercises including obstacles, fitness trails and trim trails (running circuit). It will therefore provide for a new but related recreational facility complementing the existing facilities currently provided at Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa. Given that the new facility would be of a low intensity of use and used in conjunction with existing fitness facilities, additional traffic generation and demand for parking will be limited. It is also considered that under the National Planning Policy Framework, the building would not fall within the definition of a 'main town centre use' as it could not be deemed as being a '*more intensive sport and recreation use*'. The example that is given in Annex 2 of the Framework is for a 'health and fitness centre' which would not include this particular proposal which comprises of a basic activity hall. A sequential test would therefore not be a requirement under this application.

4.3 The proposal is considered to be in full compliance with the NPPF. This would not be a 'stand alone' facility but would add additional and improved recreational opportunities to existing users of the current facilities. It is expected that the hall will generate some additional employment (coaching, personal trainers etc) thereby encouraging economic growth and job creation / prosperity in compliance with chapter 1 of the Framework. The Framework specifically states that '*significant*



*weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.'*

- 4.4 The 6No. driving range bays are to serve a re-configured driving range. They have been attached to the building to minimize the spread of development across the site.
- 4.5 In conclusion, the proposal represents a positive additional recreational facility at Bicester HGS. The use will promote health and well being in accordance with the Framework and will provide for a covered facility to complement the adjacent assault course. The activities are related to those that have already been consented. Bicester HGS is identified within the Submission Local Plan as a 'Outdoor Sports Facility' and a 'Visitor Attraction'. The new facility is consistent with both of these designations .

## 5 DESIGN AND ACCESS

- 5.1 Use: The application proposal for recreational facilities maintains the existing uses on the site. The facility would be used by existing Bicester HGS members and visitors to the hotel.
- 5.2 Amount: The new building will amount to a combined floor area of 549m<sup>2</sup>. The covered driving range bays amount to an additional 81m<sup>2</sup>.
- 5.3 Layout: The proposal would not result in tree removal or a requirement for additional parking facilities. The new building is located next to the consented assault course.
- 5.4 Scale: The new building will be commensurate with its intended use (see elevation showing ridge height) which needs to provide sufficient height for climbing equipment.
- 5.5 Landscaping: The proposal would not result in tree removal. Space will be retained around the new building for new planting.
- 5.6 Appearance: The elevation provides details of appearance.
- 5.7 Access: Vehicular access to the site will be identical to that which currently exists for the main establishment (i.e. via the main entrance from Akeman Street).

## 6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The application should be supported for the following reasons:

- i) The application proposal for the activity hall will complement the existing assault course facility and will be used by the same users comprising primarily of Bicester HGS members and hotel guests. In addition, it is also anticipated that they would be used by local groups seeking high levels of fitness. There is no other such facility in the local area. The Submission Local Plan defines the site as a 'Outdoor Sports Facility' and a 'Visitor Attraction'.
- ii) The new facility is not considered to conflict with the NPPF. Economic development and facilities for sport and recreational development are strongly supported by the Framework and it is expected that the proposal will also generate some limited additional employment opportunities. The proposal is not a 'main town centre use' and there would not be a requirement for a sequential test under the NPPF.
- iv) The proposal is designed and laid out to respect the existing site. The driving range bays are attached to the building to minimise the spread of development.
- v) The proposal will not generate significant additional vehicular movements as it will be used primarily by existing members.