

Dear Case Officer,

REPRESENTATION RELATING TO SCOPING REPORT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF SITE AT BICESTER GOLF CLUB – REF 19/01255/SCOP

1. Introduction

I am writing on behalf of Chesterton Parish Council to provide comments on the Scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed development scheme outlined above, which is subject to an EIA as part of the planning determination process.

The site in question is currently the back 9 holes of the Bicester Golf Club which is greenfield land covering 18.6 Hectares that includes a variety of differences species of trees, diverse ecological habitats and lakes. The site has no planning designation and is located in the countryside. There is a presumption against development in the countryside under Policy ESD13 in the Cherwell District Council Local Plan amongst many other policies. The site has never been promoted for development through the Local Plan process and selection of such a sensitive site in the Oxfordshire countryside for such a large-scale urbanising development is unacceptable.

This report begins by stating the scheme details, showing the extent of development proposed on this greenfield site. It then states our comments on individual points, with the Scope document reference shown in brackets. These comments either state inaccuracies or objections and should be reflected in the final scope, EIA or planning submission. Finally, we provide our conclusion.

2. Key Scheme Details

A snapshot of the development fundamentals is outlined below as follows: -

Classification of proposal	New tourism Development/Hotel – Urbanisation of a previously undeveloped greenfield site
Planning Policy Designation	No Local Plan designation – no allocation in local plan
Site Area	18.6 Hectares
Site Coverage (extent of urbanisation)	Approx. 65% of the site

3. Comments on WSP's report

3.1 (2.2.4) Public Right of Way (PRoW) Footpath 161/6

The original line of the footpath has been cut across by ponds, the waymarks are shrouded by brambles and other vegetation. A Parish Path Warden has the authority to cut back vegetation using only secateurs, thus limiting the amount of maintenance the warden can do. Wardens report to the section of OCC that looks after the records of obstructions and maintenance needed on footpaths referring to the Definitive Map of 21st February 2006.

Of the 12 Chesterton Footpaths on the Definitive Map, only ONE has not been truncated, diverted, lost to Bicester or blocked. The causes are the M40, the Bicester Sports Association, The Kings End development, the travellers' site, the Kingsmere development and a road junction. 161/6 was truncated at the A 4095 end because of the M40, with no pavement to link up with the original part of the footpath on the other side of the M40 that is now numbered 161/11. The original path is unusable at the Akeman Street end because of the blocking of a stile, the ripping up of the footpath, a wire fence, an oil tank and a masonry wall. OCC is aware of this, but little has been done to maintain this essential Public Right of Way.

We strongly object to ANY change from its current Definitive Map route.

3.2 (2.3.6) Chesterton Conservation Area

The proposed development is only 500m at its nearest point from the existing Chesterton Conservation Area. The urbanisation of a green field site within 500m of a conservation area is not acceptable.

3.3 (3.4.2) Year of Completion and Operation

It is stated in 2.2.7 that construction would start in 2021 and would last 2 years and therefore the first year of operation would be 2023 and not 2022 as stated.

3.4 (5.2.2) Use of Statistical Data

The report is correct in that there were an estimated 255 unemployed people in Cherwell in December 2017. However, the dataset contains data for all following months up to June 2019. The figures dropped significantly to half by September 2018 and continued to drop to under 90 in December 2018 with the figure being 65 for the last 3 months of data, April to June 2019.

3.5 (5.4.2) Visitor Expenditure in Local Area

Given the business model for the resort is very much about providing for all the needs of its guests under one roof, and that it will own and operate all outlets within the development, it is very difficult to understand how the level of visitor expenditure is likely to be significant in the context of the local area.

3.6 (5.4.3) Contribution to Local Leisure Offering

It is still very unclear as to the local offering of leisure facilities to residents of the area. Great Wolf in a presentation to CDC on the 5th February 2019 used Center Parcs as a comparison to their offering and in the context of 'Requires Hotel Stay to Enjoy Resort Offerings' denoted it as similar. Center Parcs ONLY allow day visitors to purchase a pass if they are visiting guests staying at the resort.

The lack of clarity also has an impact on the local traffic if, in fact, they do allow day visitors from the local area.

We believe that a statement should be made by Great Wolf indicating exactly what their offering is so a proper assessment of the benefits and impacts can be made.

The reduction of any golf course from 18 holes to 9 should not be underestimated in its impact as most members will only play 18 holes. There are currently 250 members at the club and 200 of those members have indicated that they would leave to play at another course should the 9 holes be lost. This therefore presents further concern that with only 50 members this would not likely be sufficient to support the cost of maintaining the remaining 9 holes and that would result in closure of the course entirely with the possibility of further urbanisation development taking place.

We can only view this as a long term, total loss of a picturesque 18-hole golf course and not a reduction as stated.

3.7 (5.8) Data Accuracy – Up to Date

This statement clearly states that 'Best Endeavours' will be made to ensure the data is accurate and up to date. This NOMIS database used to gather the data referenced in 5.2.2 (3.4 Above) is accurate and up to date. However, the selection of December 2017 was clearly not the most appropriate use of the data available when the latest data would be the most appropriate.

3.8 (6.1.2) Transport Study Area

It would have been appropriate to include the study area agreed with OCC in the scoping document to allow us to comment.

3.9 (6.2.1) Akeman Street not Green Lane

Despite the address of the proposed development being Green Lane the main, existing access to the golf club is from Akeman Street. Road name accuracy is imperative in any submission to ensure misunderstandings and confusion are avoided.

3.10 (6.3.1) Traffic Sensitive Receptors

With an estimated 500,00 visitors to this development per year and given the current traffic situation in the local area and that of the committed developments we struggle to see how the sensitivity can be set to medium for cars and believe this should be set to High.

3.11 (6.3.2) Safe Cycling

Given the already concerning consideration above (3.11) it is difficult to see how the effect on cyclists can be any different to that of cars. The statement that cyclist will use 'quieter back roads' demonstrates the lack of understanding of existing village road network and its use. The sensitivity should, at a minimum, be set to medium.

3.12 (6.5.1) Travel Plan

Details of users of a 'Pedestrian Link' should be submitted at the planning stage.

Any Travel Plan created should be submitted at the planning stage to ensure that its effectiveness can be evaluated.

3.13 (9) Biodiversity

We have attached a document for consideration which is our Ecological survey of the existing Fauna and Flora within the current site. Clearly, we are unable to provide any seasonal variations given the notice period we have been given to respond.

3.14 (12.3.1) Footpath Use

Please see 3.1 above.

3.15 (14.1.6) Transport Assessment – Committed Developments

Again, it would have been appropriate to include the scope of committed developments agreed with CDC/OCC in this document to allow us to comment.

4. Conclusion

The documents submitted by the applicant are very detailed covering numerous technical areas which CDC/OCC's relevant technical departments will need to review and comment upon. The submission of an EIA is wholly appropriate for a large scale, unsustainable development such as this.

The site in question has never been developed upon and contributes to both the local landscape and provides a valuable local amenity use as a golf course. The proposal will create a significant urbanisation of the site and impact on the local area which is irreversible and will only enable further urbanisation of this area in the future. As such, the environmental impact of this proposal must be robustly analysed by CDC to demonstrate the irrecoverable harm this proposal will have on this site and surrounding area which completely outweighs the questionable benefits the applicant suggests the proposal will bring.