



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

Appeal by Great Lakes UK Limited against Cherwell District Council's refusal to grant planning permission for the redevelopment of part of golf course to provide new leisure resort (sui generis) incorporating waterpark, family entertainment centre, hotel, conferencing facilities and restaurants with associated access, parking and landscaping at land to the east of M40 and south of A4095 Chesterton Bicester Oxfordshire

Appellant	:	Great Lakes UK Limited
Appeal Site	:	Land to east of the M40 and south of the A4095, Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 1TH
Appellant's Agent	:	DP9 Limited
LPA Reference	:	19/02550/F
Planning Inspectorate Reference	:	APP/C3105/W/20/3259189

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

of

PAUL ALMOND

Street Scene & Landscape Manager, Cherwell District Council

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Paul Almond. I am employed by Cherwell District Council as its Street Scene & Landscape Manager.
- 1.2 Between 1993 – 1997 I was Golf Course Manager at Chesham Park Golf Course in the Borough of Broxbourne. In addition to my duties of management and maintenance of the golf course, I managed new green and tee construction. Between 1990 – 1993 I was Golf Course Manager at Newbold Common Golf Course in Warwick District. In addition to my duties of management and maintenance of the golf course, I managed new green and tee construction. Between 1988 – 1990 I was Golf Course Manager at Humberstone Heights Golf Course in Leicester. In addition to my duties of management and maintenance of the golf course, I managed alterations to course layout due to a new relief road construction in conjunction with Hawtree & Sons Golf Course Architects. Between 1987 – 1988 I was a Landscape Development Chargehand at Beaumont Park Par 3 Golf Facility in Leicester where I supervised the layout and construction of a 9 hole golf facility. Throughout my career I have gained knowledge from golfers about what they find attractive and acceptable in terms of course layout and speed of play. In addition, as a keen golfer myself, I have experienced playing at many courses and understand from a customer prospective the importance of good design and layout from a players point of view.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF PROOF

- 2.1 In addition to the proof of evidence provided by Thomas Darlington, Senior Community Infrastructure Officer, which addresses the loss of golf provision, this proof of evidence relates specifically to further information provided by the appellant regarding a design proposal for the inclusion of an additional nine holes within the remaining nine holes. This proposal suggests that by installing new tee-off positions and doubling up play on each hole, with golfers playing to the same green, it will negate the loss of golf provision.
- 2.2 I will explain the technical reasons why the proposal is inappropriate and does not address the Council's concerns regarding the loss of golf provision within the Bicester sub-area of Cherwell District and therefore the Council considers the appeal proposal to be unacceptable.

3. APPEAL SITE LOCATION AND PROPOSAL

Appeal Site Location

- 3.1 The appeal site extends to 18.6 hectares and comprises the western nine holes of an existing 18-hole golf course that forms part of Bicester Hotel, Golf and Spa (BHGS) near Chesterton, a village located to the southwest of Bicester. The detail of the appeal site and its context is described on other evidence and will not be repeated here.

The Appeal Proposal

- 3.2 The appeal relates to a refused planning application (CDC Ref: 19/02550/F) which sought planning permission for a Leisure resort consisting of:
- A 498-bed Hotel (27,250m²);
 - An Indoor Water Park (8,340m²) with external slide tower (height 22.5m);
 - A Family Entertainment Centre (12,350m²) including an adventure park, food and beverage and merchandise retail facilities, plus Conferencing (comprising 550m²) and back of house facilities;
 - An Adventure Park providing rope course, climbing wall, miniature golf, family bowling, arcade games and an interactive role-playing game;
 - Associated access and landscaping;
 - 902 new parking spaces; and
 - Public parkland (6 hectares) including nature trails and play spaces.

4. REASONS FOR REFUSAL

- 4.1 The Council's Planning Committee resolved to refuse the application on 12th March 2020 for six reasons, but this Proof of evidence relates purely to the Council's first reason, which is as follows:

1. The proposed development by reason of its location would result in the loss of an 18-hole golf course when the Local Planning Authority's evidence indicates the course is not surplus to requirements and there is a need for more provision for golf courses in the Bicester sub-area over the plan period. The evidence and proposals for alternative sports and recreation provision included with the application is not considered sufficient to make the loss of the golf course

acceptable. The development is contrary to Policy BSC10 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 which seeks to protect existing sport and recreation provision and enhance the existing provision. It is also contrary to Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. THE COUNCIL'S CASE

5.1 Planning permission for the proposed development was refused at the Planning Committee meeting on 12 March 2020 for the reasons detailed at paragraph 4.1 above.

Golfing Impacts – Refusal Reason 1

5.2 One-day before application Ref: 19/02550/F was refused on 12th March 2020, the Appellant's representatives suggested that the nine golf holes to be lost as a consequence of their redevelopment proposals could potentially be re-provided through a reconfiguration of the remaining 9-hole course to provide a smaller 18-hole facility with two holes sharing each fairway, the proposed reconfigured layout is detailed below.



- 5.3 The yellow lines and red lines indicate what the Appellant suggested could be a potentially viable alternative new layout utilising existing tee and green positions with the provision of nine new additional tee positions. These proposals utilise the existing layout of the back nine holes of the existing course and have added in an extra alternative nine tee-off positions within the same footprint of the existing nine hole course.
- 5.4 In my capacity as the Council's Street Scene & Landscape Manager and given my extensive golf course management and design experience, I was consulted on the Appellant's suggested golf course redesign proposals and my comments are detailed below.
- 5.5 The proposal does not address the loss of the par 36, 3228 yards front nine holes, the additional holes will have to be significantly reduced, meaning it could not be classed as a course suitable for competition as an 18-hole course. The recommended par for a golf course should have a Par between 69 and 74 This should be a mixture of par fives, par fours and par threes. The par of a golf hole identifies how many shots it should take a non-handicap golfer to play the hole. The suggested revised layout would introduce what appears to be six par-3 holes, two par-4 holes and one par-5 hole, i.e. nine new holes with a combined par of 31 and result in the reconfigured 18-hole course having a revised overall par of just 67.
- 5.6 There seems to be little or no design thought in the proposal as to where the additional tee positions have been positioned. Golfers not only have long walks between greens to the next tees, but would also have to cross fairways where other golfers will be teeing off or playing. Some tee positions are suggested in locations obscured by trees, such as holes 7, 9, 14 and 17. This is compounded by some suggested new tee positions being located close to likely landing zones from tees on the same shared fairways, such as holes 9, 10, 13, 15 and 17. All nine new holes (six of which would be par-3 holes) would share fairways and greens with the existing nine holes. In some instances, to walk between greens and tees would involve long distances (holes 8 to 9, 9 to 10, 11 to 12, 12 to 13, 14 to 15 and 16 to 17) and would involve crossing the fairways of other holes (8 to 9, 9 to 10, 11 to 12, 12 to 13, 14 to 15 and 16 to 17).

5.7 With the exception of the hole numbers 2 and 11, which would share the same tee position, the eight other proposed holes would feature new tee positions set forward of the existing hole tees, where golfers would be at risk from stray golf balls being hit from existing tee positions sharing the same fairways.

5.8 The addition of second tee boxes on the same hole will slow play down, meaning the time needed to play a round will significantly increase above the average 4 hours to play a normal 18-hole course.

6. OVERALL BALANCE

6.1 The proposal does not adequately replace the loss of the par 36 existing front nine holes. The proposed new nine new holes (six of which would be par-3 holes) would reduce the yardage making it a par 31 back nine.

6.2 Poor design, the proposal does not make logical sense for golfers to navigate from the shared greens to the new proposed tees.

6.3 Due to the positioning of the additional proposed tee boxes, the Health and Safety compromises are unacceptable, as golfers could be hit by golf balls being played by other golfers on the same fairway but on the alternative hole.

6.4 Priority for play on each hole will mean that golfers will have long waits before being able to tee off/play shots which will significantly slow play down on the suggested redesigned course.

6.5 It is my opinion that the combination of all these factors will make the golf facility less attractive to play, render it unsafe, will reduce membership and discourage visitor pay and play.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The development of the appeal site in the manner proposed would cause material harm to golf facility provision in the Bicester sub-area of the District through unacceptable and unsafe re-provision with the accommodation of 18 holes in a re-design of the residual 9-

hole course, with two holes sharing each fairway. The sporting harm that would be caused would be contrary to adopted Development Plan policies, the Council's adopted Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment and Strategy (October 2018) and relevant national policy as set out in the NPPF and national guidance set out by Sport England and England Golf.

7.2 For these reasons, the Inspector is respectfully requested to dismiss this appeal with respect to the Council's first reason for refusal.