

**10875 – Great Wolf Lodge, Bicester
EPR Architects Proof of Evidence (CD12-15)**

12.01.2021

Proposed Great Wolf Lodge
Chesterton, Bicester

**Architectural Design and Scheme Development
Evidence on behalf of Great Lakes UK Limited**

of

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Illustration of the Great Wolf Resort, Bicester: Arrival and Entrance

EPR Architects

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1.1 My name is Nick Rayner. I am a qualified architect with over 20 years of architectural design experience. I have been registered with the Architects' Registration Board (ARB) since qualification in 2001, and a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) since that time. I am a graduate of the University of Sheffield's School of Architecture having achieved a BA (Honours) degree in Architectural Studies (1996) and subsequent Diploma in Architecture (1999). I also have an RIBA Certificate in Project Management (2003). My proof of evidence in respect of design matters is provided on behalf of Great Lakes Ltd (the "Appellant").
- 1.1.2 I joined EPR Architects in 2005, following more than five years of experience in the commercial and residential sectors, including projects with leading charities with an emphasis on design for the disabled. Whilst at EPR I have been responsible for a broad portfolio of architectural projects, chiefly in the hotel and hospitality sector. I have also undertaken the roles of auditor and hospitality design consultant on UK and international hotel schemes such as the Palace Hotel, Kiev and the Çırağan Palace, Istanbul. My experience is predominantly with hotel and hospitality projects in the UK.
- 1.1.3 EPR Architects is an award-winning architectural studio based in Central London, Manchester and Wrocław, Poland. With over 70 years of experience in the industry we provide project leadership and expert construction knowledge spanning a range of project typologies from urban regeneration masterplans, global corporate headquarters and progressive industrial parks to prestigious heritage conservations, ultra-luxury residences, boutique hotels and spas, price point residential buildings, the private rental sector and serviced apartments.
- 1.1.4 EPR's work spans a broad range of sectors and building types, and within the practice we have specific teams focussing on residential, commercial and workplace, master planning, and hotel and hospitality design. We have a dedicated team of more than forty architects and designers working almost exclusively on hotel and hospitality projects, with a varied array of hotel operators and developers. I am one of four Directors responsible for the management and operation of this team.
- 1.1.5 We pride ourselves on being a practice without ego and without a house style. Each project is bespoke to its particular client and location, and our final designs are a result of a creative collaboration between a multitude of architects, designers and technicians. From the concept design stage onwards, projects are regularly reviewed by EPR colleagues who do not form part of the project team. This ensures that the emerging and maturing designs are informed by the cross-fertilisation of ideas, skills and experience that resides in the practice.

EPR Architects

- 1.1.6 EPR Architects has over 20 years' experience in the hotel sector, ranging from limited service hotels to award winning luxury hotels. EPR has been involved with some of most innovative and ground-breaking developers and operators as our clients. Our experience is broad, covering new builds, conversions, extensions and refurbishments across a wide range of hotel types, from limited service to boutique and five-star deluxe hotels. We design for conservation areas of historical significance and our approach includes research, restoration and sensitive intervention. In addition to city-centre, airport and resort locations. Our hotel experience also covers mixed-use schemes and iconic sporting destinations.
- 1.1.7 Our approach is not simply to deliver new buildings, but to focus on providing a new destination to enhance and promote the local area. This starts at the conception of a project to look at its context and urban scale, to understand what the project can bring beyond the initial brief, to unlock the wider potential of a Site and understand its place in the community.
- 1.1.8 We are collaborative in our approach working not just closely with our clients but also wider stakeholders where we listen to, and work alongside third parties to help guide a project to a successful outcome.
- 1.1.9 The many projects I, along with the EPR team have been involved in include:
- (1) The Hilton Hotel at the Ageas Bowl, Southampton for which I was the principal architect and lead designer. This project involved the masterplan of the Site around the cricket pitch and pavilion. The design extended the venue to a 25,000-seat cricket stadium, stand, spectator facilities and golf course, designed with the objective of becoming the first cricket ground to achieve the England and Wales Cricket Board's 'model ground' status. Central to the design, the new-build 171 guestroom Hilton includes an executive lounge, a luxury spa, a signature restaurant, a 700-seat conference hall and banqueting facilities. Uniquely, it integrates media facilities and studios for press writers radio and television broadcasters that convert from hotel uses on major match days.
- (2) Coworth Park, Berkshire. This project involved the restoration and refurbishment of a hotel in a rural setting in open countryside, as well as regeneration of an entire estate. It is illustrative of EPR's experience of working with project briefs that include functions beyond singular hotel buildings – in this case, re-use of estate buildings for alternative guest dining and conference facilities as well as connection with the estate's wider sporting and leisure use.
- (3) The Belfry Resort, North Warwickshire. Located in the countryside, this project designed a significant extension to the hotel as part of the golf resort, again illustrative of EPR's experience working with project briefs that include functions beyond just hotel use. The project involved recasting the Site masterplan and design of a new hotel guestroom wing, a ballroom and conferencing facility and a leisure building including fitness studios and swimming pool.
- 1.1.10 I attach project information sheets for these schemes by way of illustration as Appendix 2.

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- 1.1.11 Recent award winning hotel projects that EPR has designed include: Rosewood Hotel, Holborn, The Gainsborough, Bath, The Ace Hotel, Shoreditch High Street, The Lalit Hotel, Southwark, The Ned, City of London, Marriott Hotel & Banqueting, Conferences & Event Space, Heathrow, and the Kimpton Fitzroy, Russel Square, London.
- 1.1.12 As a Director within the Hotels Team at EPR, I have been responsible for managing the architectural services for the Great Wolf Lodge, Bicester project on behalf of the Appellant. I led the team of architects and designers within EPR working on the project and led the architectural design development process culminating in the planning application in November 2019.
- 1.1.13 In the role of Lead Designer, I have been responsible with the EPR team for designing and coordinating the emerging design proposals with all consultants, as well as participating in pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority, wider stakeholders, and attending public consultations.
- 1.1.14 I oversaw the production of the architectural planning drawings and the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and responding to queries from the Local Planning Authority and other parties where necessary.

1.2 Declaration

- 1.2.1 The evidence which I have prepared and provide in this proof of evidence for this appeal is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

1.3 Structure of the document

- 1.3.1 The structure of the proof is as follows:
- (i) Section 2.0 provides a summary of the project brief, our initial analysis of the Site constraints and opportunities and the emerging design concepts, as well as details of the pre-application engagement with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Cherwell District Council (CDC).
 - (ii) Section 3.0 provides a more detailed description of the architectural design proposals as presented in the planning application material, as the culmination of the study and appraisal work and consultation with Officers.
 - (iii) Section 4.0 provides details of our response to reason for refusal 4 as set out in the Planning Decision notice (CD3-1) and CDC's Statement of Case.
 - (iv) There is an appendix to this proof (CD12-17) which contains illustrations relevant to the evidence below, and figure references are located within the body of this text.

1.4 Scope and Nature of Evidence

1.4.1 The scope of evidence provided in my proof relates to the architectural design of the proposal development, and my response to the reasons for refusal are directed at addressing the matters raised in reason for refusal 4. There are 6 reasons for refusal in the Decision Notice (CD3-1) and other matters relating to landscape visual impact, drainage / flood risk, highways and transport, golf provision, planning and biodiversity are addressed in the evidence of the following:

- Planning : Chris Goddard, DP9 (CD12-3)
- Highways & Transport : Philip Bell, Motion (CD12-12)
- Landscape Design and Landscape Visual Impact : Richard Waddell, BMD (CD12-6)
- Drainage & Flood Risk : Richard Bettridge, Motion (CD12-18)
- Biodiversity: James Patmore, BMD (CD12-21)
- Golf Provision : John Ashworth, John Ashworth Assoc. (CD12-9)

1.4.2 My proof of evidence sets out how the architectural design was established in response to the brief with reference to the character and context of the Site location, and through consultation with the local authority and other groups. It describes the proposed design to demonstrate how the form and massing is articulated within the landscape and is tailored to accommodate the highly integrated hotel, entertainment, conference and waterpark elements.

1.4.3 My evidence demonstrates that the architectural response is intended to be of a very high quality, with careful consideration given to a design that is landscape-led in approach, and which has addressed matters of contextuality and any impact on the character of the local area and therefore does not result in any of the adverse effects alleged in the reason for refusal 4, but rather delivers significant and substantial benefits.

2.0 EVOLUTION OF THE DESIGN

2.1 Project Brief

2.1.1 The Design and Access Statement (DAS) (CD1-7), at Section 2.1, provides further details of the project brief. In summary, the Appellant is responsible for a leading brand of family resorts in the United States that focus on providing a leisure experience centred around an indoor waterpark, family entertainment centre and eating opportunities, along with hotel accommodation, generally aimed at families with children aged up to 12.

2.1.2 The Appellant opened its first resort in Wisconsin Dells in 1997. It now seeks to open its first in the UK. The Appellant identified the Bicester area as a suitable general location for their first resort in this country due to (amongst other things) the area's profile in respect of other tourist destinations, its proximity and accessibility to other major urban centres, as well as its links to the transport network. A Great Wolf Lodge at Bicester would be the only Great Wolf family resort in the UK and it is designed to deliver a very high quality,

affordable and fun-filled getaway that families can enjoy together, offering a wide range of exciting and unrivalled entertainment experiences in one location.

2.2 The Local Area

2.2.1 Further details of the local area are given in section 3.1 and 3.2 of the DAS report. In summary, the Site in question is located immediately east of the M40 and very close to Bicester, a fast-growing settlement. It lies immediately to the south of the A4095.

2.2.2 Chesterton lies to the east of the Site and Little Chesterton to south, leading further south to the A41 and junction 9 of the M40. The M40 to the west of the site connects to London, Oxford and Birmingham. South east of the Site running east along the A41 there a number of “out-of-town” developments, including the Bicester park and ride car park, the Bicester Avenue Garden Centre and retail park, Whitelands Farm Sports Ground, the Premier Inn Bicester Hotel, a Tesco Superstore and the Bicester Village retail development.

2.2.3 Chesterton village sits largely to the south and east of the A4095, with Alchester Road being its main vehicular thoroughfare. The eastern part of the village is designated as being within the Chesterton Conservation Area. Chesterton is comprised of mainly single private dwellings, and smaller community facilities including schools, a pub, community centre and church. Buildings in the village range in age from the 12th Century (namely Manor Farmhouse and St Mary’s Church on Manor Farm Lane) in the Conservation Area to small 20th Century housing developments. On the edge of the village there are larger houses and the Chesterton Hotel. There is a Grade II listed barn at Chesterton Fields Farmhouse to the west of the Site and further west are the Registered Park & Gardens of Middleton Park and Kirtlington Park.

2.2.4 Bicester is a growing town with a population of approximately 30,000 people. It is bounded by the A4095 to the north, Skimmingdish Lane and Charbridge Lane to the east, and the A41 to the south. The town centre (2 miles east of the Site) has expanded into a more sub-urban centre with destination retail, leisure and community facilities, but the historic market centre remains firmly established around Church Street, Market Square and Sheep Street.

2.2.5 Today’s Bicester has a variety of building styles and materials. Local stone quarries supplied a pale oolitic limestone and local clay pits provided bricks of variable appearance. Twentieth century colour washes have been replaced by off whites and creams. The two predominant roofing materials are Welsh slate and plain clay tiles, although some of these have been supplemented or partially replaced in recent times by imported slates, (including Welsh slate), cement slates, and cement tiles.

2.2.6 Bicester and the surrounding area has also historically been home to several manor houses and large country estates, on account of its proximity to London and other commercial centres.

2.3 Appeal Site Characteristics

- 2.3.1 The Appeal Site is part of the existing Bicester Hotel, Golf & Spa that lies to the west of Chesterton village. It is currently occupied by the western nine holes of the golf course. Immediately to the east of the Appeal Site are two private dwellings, Vicarage Farm and Stableford House. Bignell Park Farms is situated to the north of the Site on the northern side of the A4095. An existing Public Right of Way (PRoW), coded as 161/6/10 by Oxfordshire County Council, runs through the Site, entering from the Golf Club car park on the southern boundary, and exiting on the northern boundary along the A4095.
- 2.3.2 The Site is triangular in plan form and largely land locked on two of the three sides (west and east), with the only direct access off the highway network on the northern side.
- 2.3.3 The topography of the Site gently slopes down from north to south, a total of approx. 7m difference, away from the A4095, with localised steeper slopes at the north western edge of the Site as the ground rises to form the motorway flyover.
- 2.3.4 As a managed and landscaped golf course, the Site has an existing leisure use close to a significant town and villages. The Site itself is currently without built structures, but it includes fairways, sand bunkers, greens and tee positions associated with the golf course use, as well as ponds of varying sizes, predominantly located in the north western corner of the Site. There are scattered trees across the Site, with a large woodland / plantation in the northern part of the central area of the Site
- 2.3.5 An existing Site plan is included with the planning application drawings, ref. "10875-ZZ-DR-TP-0101".

2.4 Initial Architectural Site Appraisal

- 2.4.1 EPR Architects was commissioned to work on an architectural design for the project in early 2019 after the Site had been identified by the Appellant. The Appellant had already appointed DP9 as planning consultants to advise on planning matters and to liaise with the development team at Cherwell District Council (CDC), the Local Planning Authority, and an initial meeting with CDC had already taken place.
- 2.4.2 At that stage, I was provided with a preliminary sketch study option for the proposed Site layout prepared by another firm of architects that had been involved in the early stages. **See fig. 01**. My first task was to review the proposal in light of more detailed information about the Site itself. I identified, in collaboration with the landscape design consultant BMD, that it would be preferable to leave the north western corner of the Site open due to the established network of ponds and natural features in that location, and considered in more detail the extent of the proposed built form to be provided. I also considered that the plan form of the buildings could be reordered and reorganised so as to reduce internal travel distances within the building whilst improving the efficiency of the layout and reducing the overall extent of the built form.

- 2.4.3 In discussions I had with the Appellant’s transport consultant, it was agreed that a single vehicular entry and egress point into the development was preferable so as to minimise the number of junctions on the A4095 as would be standard practice This also naturally reflected the immediate context of the Site being largely “land-locked” on two of the three sides
- 2.4.4 I then commenced the process of developing options for the overall proposed Site arrangement in light of this. I produced a “Site constraints plan” which we used to collate key survey information about the Site which would impact the proposals and inform the design and I also identified potential opportunities along with those constraints.
- 2.4.5 This process also served to identify key visual receptors and potentially sensitive landscape viewpoints based on the work carried out by the Appellant’s landscape design consultant, BMD **See fig. 02.**
- 2.4.6 As part of that process, I, along with our client (the Appellant) and BMD, established that the north west corner of the Site presented an important opportunity to provide high quality outdoor public amenity space. I also identified the opportunity for this area to be used for educational, as well as recreational purposes. This concept aligned with the Appellant’s own aspirations to provide a well-designed contextual response to the Site and its locality.
- 2.4.7 I prepared an initial series of diagrams showing potential Proposed Development layout options based on this study work. These diagrams reflected what I, working alongside BMD, regarded to be a “landscape-led” approach, where the best location for the position of the buildings and the open area responded fully both to the immediate landscape constraints and opportunities of the Site itself, and also the wider areas around the vicinity of the Site and consideration of landscape character and from where the Proposed Development might be visible. The visual effects of the proposal would also be further addressed through proposed landscaping features, working with BMD.
- 2.4.8 Using this landscape-led approach, I determined that the ideal location for the building itself was deep within the heart of the Site, towards the southern end. This positioning allowed for the heavily soft-landscaped car park area towards the north eastern part of the Site and avoided having a built form near the A4095, or near to the two residential properties of Vicarage Farm and Stableford House immediately to the east of the development Site. The proposed building location also protected the north western corner of the Site and its potential use for public amenity and habitat creation, it also being better located away from the M40 in terms of minimising noise effects. This approach also had the benefit of locating the buildings at the topographically lower end of the Site, so further reducing the effects of the overall height of the building in the landscape.
- 2.4.9 This gave effect to one of the core principles of the design development, that of “layering” the proposals within the Site. Layers of landscaped visual screening of the built form are established within the Site, using both established existing vegetation around the northern perimeter and enhancing such existing vegetation

with new landscaping and vegetation, whilst positioning the building deep within the Site away from any more sensitive surroundings. **See fig. 03.**

2.4.10 The identification of the Proposed Development's constraints included consideration of the existing Public Right of Way (PRoW) through the Site and the opportunity to enhance the PRoW by relocating it within the Site. It was agreed within the project team that the proposed re-routing would be subject to discussions with representatives from the Local Planning Authority, CDC, and the Legal Services Rights of Way Officer, but initial analysis demonstrated that the existing PRoW is seldom used and, on the limited occasions when it was used, the existing route was very problematic and also disruptive to the operation of the Golf Club. The aspiration was to create a route that would better serve the users of it (i.e. a dedicated route with an enhanced experience) whilst also serving the needs of the development. From a design perspective, it would be preferable for the users of the PRoW to have a dedicated route that did not require traversing the development Site, and this in turn was preferable for the Proposed Development itself.

2.4.11 Another important determination I made in this period, along with the client, was identifying the access point for outdoor amenity for guests / customers, as well as users of the conference centre, taking account of the optimum location for the main service bay. In light of opportunities offered by the open space provision to the north west, I took the view that direct access for guests and users of the conference centre from the north western side of the building into the public nature area was preferable. The service bay was accordingly identified for a position on the south eastern side of the building. The initial stage of the design process is illustrated in **fig. 04.**

2.5 Developing the Architectural Design Concepts

2.5.1 The built form of the development is comprised of three key elements; the hotel, the family entertainment centre (FEC) including the conference centre, and the waterpark buildings. The buildings require a certain height to accommodate the uses (including the waterpark in particular for air circulation and the provision of gravity driven water slides). I worked with the waterpark design consultant to minimise the height of the slide tower and the main waterpark building and we established a maximum datum for the height of the built form for the entire architectural proposal. I then sought to position the tallest part of the buildings deep within the Site's plan form, towards the southern end of the Site.

2.5.2 This approach justified another core principle of the design development, namely that of addressing any perceived scale and massing of the building through careful arrangement of the different functions on the Site. My aim was to address both the functional connectivity requirements whilst assimilating the building into the Site context and reflecting the design principle of experiencing the buildings through various screening layers. **See fig. 03.**

2.5.3 The limited height requirements of the FEC part of proposal enabled us to use its location to split the form between the two other parts (hotel and waterpark) with the FEC and conference centre acting as a relatively low-lying connector in the middle. **See fig. 05.** This also suited the functional connectivity requirements of

the development brief. I identified that the FEC and conference centre could have a flat roof to reinforce this massing split. This concept was further developed in the later design stages when we incorporated a green (seeded) area on the flat roof to reinforce the splitting of the two other built forms, with the idea of a green-roofed “landscape” in between.

- 2.5.4 The height and massing of the waterpark building lends itself to a pitched roof design. The building requires mechanical ventilation infrastructure overhead internally. A pitched roof enables the use of lower roof eaves, with a lower height to the perimeter walls, whilst still providing the required height in the centre of the space for such infrastructure. The slide tower is situated close to the existing mature woodland buffer along the M40 boundary to maximise the immediate effect of its screening. Early discussions I had with the Head of Planning, Team Leader, and Case Officer at CDC on the aesthetics of the materials to be used also informed my approach to the massing profile, with a desire to reference the architecture of agricultural buildings that are commonplace within a rural setting.
- 2.5.5 The hotel part of the development includes hotel guestrooms, lobby, reception, main dining room, and other retail associated areas within the foyer. The building is designed to accommodate the 498 guestrooms along with a requirement that the entrance, reception and foyer of the hotel be centrally located about the hotel guestroom wings in a way which is identifiable from the entrance approach and car park. I undertook a series of studies of the use of two, three, four or taller storey massing heights. Clearly the lower the building height, the more expansive the building potentially becomes on plan. I initially considered limiting the building to a four storey, horseshoe or c-shaped plan form, centred around the main reception and arrival point. I subsequently reduced the height as a result of discussions with CDC’s planning officers (as summarised below).
- 2.5.6 The initial approach to the architectural appearance of the hotel part of the development was informed by the successful architectural design of Great Wolf Lodges elsewhere, but with a view to adapting it to reflect the local vernacular in Oxfordshire. We initially considered the use of duo-pitched roofs to the hotel wings (as used elsewhere in Great Wolf lodges), but I then evolved that design approach in light of the principles of the location of the built form, the connectivity requirements and the approach to layering that I have described above based on the Site constraints (as summarised below).

2.6 Pre-Application Engagement

- 2.6.1 DP9 led the pre-application engagement with representatives from Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). This was a continuation of the initial consultation the Appellant and DP9 had previously started prior to EPR’s appointment. It reflected a collaborative approach that I consider important. We seek feedback from the local authorities and other parties at meetings. We then review and respond to that feedback where appropriate by, adjusting the design proposals accordingly.
- 2.6.2 In addition to the pre-application meetings with CDC and OCC, DP9 also arranged a meeting with Chesterton Parish Council (CPC), and in conjunction with public relations consultancy Redwood Consulting,

hosted two multiple day public consultation exhibition events. EPR's role at the Parish Council meeting was to explain the principles of the project brief, the nature of the design elements of the Proposed Development, and to seek feedback from the members alongside the other consultants. I We provided drawings and illustrations to explain the proposals. I attended the public consultation events to explain the design elements and to answer questions from the attendees. As described in section 1.0 above, our practice culture and approach is a collaborative one, and so the EPR team and I welcomed this opportunity to engage with the local authorities and other parties.

- 2.6.3 Our pre-application discussions with CDC were held mainly with the CDC Planning Team Leader, Case Officer and Landscape Officer. There was no design officer assigned to the application. The first pre-application meeting with CDC that I attended was in March 2019. I, along with members of the EPR team, explained the concept of a Great Wolf Lodge and talked through the Site's constraints and opportunities. BMD attended to discuss the agreement of verified viewpoints for the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) with the Landscape Officer.
- 2.6.4 Feedback from CDC from this meeting in relation to design is summarised in section 5.0 of the DAS. It was confirmed with the landscape officer that a "landscape-led" approach to design was being taken. This reflected our initial architectural Site appraisal and concept work up to that point. Officers commented on the potential size and scale of what was being proposed. BMD and I identified that a robust approach to visual impact was to be undertaken. Details of the presented drawings are shown in the DAS. Please also refer to **fig. 06**.
- 2.6.5 At the second pre-application meeting in May 2019 the EPR team presented a re-cap of the discussions and presentation from the first meeting, followed by the presentation of an updated Site plan. This showed a reduced footprint of the FEC and the moving of the waterpark building away from the M40, with sketch sections through the proposed building and an aerial artistic representation of the overall emerging design. **See figs 05 & 07**. BMD presented initial wireline views prepared as part of the LVIA process, based on the viewpoints agreed at pre-app 01 and the architectural design massing from EPR.
- 2.6.6 A summary of the comments made is set out in the DAS (pg. 32). Some questions were raised about the outlook from guestrooms overlooking the FEC. This led to the consideration of including the green / living roof element. As already noted, having a single access point off the A4095 was considered preferable. I agreed to undertake further work on the removal of the second access.
- 2.6.7 In relation to scale and massing, questions were raised about the substantial nature of the buildings and their relationship to the landscape. Officers did not support the c-shaped layout of the guestroom wings, or a proposal for the hotel wings to have a single eaves and ridge line. The CDC area manager suggested that the hotel wings being proposed had an institutional feel and considered that the mass could be broken down and details such as façade materials and window treatment could be looked at to address this. The Head of Planning expressed the view that the architectural characteristics should deliver a sense of England and Oxfordshire and he wished to see more detail on this at the next meeting. Other comments related to pulling

the building further away from the M40 to ensure a continuous vegetation buffer and a desire to retain as many existing trees as possible on the Site, using existing soft landscaping to break up the car park layout. I therefore sought to address all of these points in our further work on the evolution of the design.

- 2.6.8 The EPR team attended a third pre-application meeting with CDC officers in June 2019. This was immediately before the first three-day public consultation event and followed a meeting with CPC earlier that week where the principal concerns expressed related to traffic. The Appellant's transport consultant, Motion, attended along with members of OCC to consider traffic-related matters. It was confirmed that a more comprehensive architectural design update would be the subject of the forthcoming fourth pre-application meeting, but a preliminary update was presented following the comments that had been received at the last pre application meeting. The details of that update are set out in more detail in the DAS (at page 33). They include confirming the re-positioning of the buildings further away from the M40, the proposed re-massing of the hotel guestroom wings and the breaking up of the car park layout so as to retain more existing trees (**see figure. 08**).
- 2.6.9 One of the key design changes at this stage was the proposed re-massing of the guestroom wings. In light of the comments received, I moved away from the horseshoe or c-shaped plan form. I introduced steps in the plan form, both halfway along each guestroom wing, and then turning the gable end of the wings inward in order to face the central entrance/arrival zone. This addressed the concern expressed about longer continuous ridge and eaves heights in the earlier proposals, as well as observations made about an institutional feel. Initial sketch proposals for the roof and façade characteristics were also presented. These married the aesthetic of shallow roof pitches with overhanging eaves and gables with the local vernacular by using materials commonplace in the English countryside (e.g. limestone, tiling, coloured or stained timber) (**see sections 3.1 to 3.2 of the DAS**).
- 2.6.10 The proposed changes to the guestroom wing massing were welcomed by officers in their feedback, but with a request to see if the overall heights could be reduced. The question of the prominence and visibility of the FEC roof was raised at the meeting. EPR confirmed that this would be presented in more detail in the future pre-application meeting. The case officer was keen to see the development of the waterpark building's aesthetics and how it could reinforce local distinctiveness. We also confirmed that this would be presented in more detail at the future meeting. Clarity was also sought on exactly which trees were to be retained in the revised car park design, and a proposal for the alterations to the PRoW was requested, along with a request for further "greening" of the car park area. We agreed that we would look further at these issues and present them in more detail at the next pre-application meeting.
- 2.6.11 That meeting was held in July 2019 at which we presented our updated architectural and landscape design proposals.
- 2.6.12 I explained that by slightly extending the footprint of the guestrooms wings to the rear (on the southern side), the mass of the wings at the front of the building (considered to be the more sensitive location to the northern side of the Site) was reduced to three storeys, rather than four (**see fig. 09**). This also broke up the roof

ridge and eaves lines and significantly reduced the visual impact of the building when viewed from locations immediately around the Site. In conjunction with the emerging soft landscape design proposals from BMD, this gave the impression of a cluster of buildings glimpsed through broken up views created by the proposed vegetation. Further details of this change can be found in the DAS, pg. 34.

- 2.6.13 I presented artistic impressions of the external materials and architectural expression and the detail of the guestroom wings, the hotel entrance “porte cochere”, the waterpark, the ballroom (conference centre) and FEC elements. I identified how the buildings were proposed to be clad in materials common to Oxfordshire, such as coloured or stained timber, “Cotswold stone”, and utilising features such as gallow brackets and corbels to the more prominent elevations. I illustrated how the waterpark building envelope design had been heavily influenced by that of agricultural buildings common to rural areas such as this, so reinforcing the local distinctiveness.
- 2.6.14 Along with BMD, I presented an updated car park layout. This identified which existing trees on the Site were to be retained and how the car park layout had been adjusted accordingly. It was explained that retaining all existing trees would in fact result in a larger, less efficient, more convoluted and less safe layout for vehicle users. Therefore, a balance was required between retaining trees where possible, whilst providing a legible and efficient car park design (**fig. 10**). BMD presented a range of proposals for the soft landscaping zones around the Site.
- 2.6.15 The work undertaken to reduce the height of the guestroom wings was welcomed by the Head of Planning. The case officer expressed a residual concern about the scale of the building generally, suggesting that the pitch of the roofs appeared too shallow in the context of the local area and that the pitched roof overhangs were quite large. He also raised an issue about the absence of hierarchy of windows on the elevations. The Head of Planning suggested that the horizontal banding of materials proposed at that stage did not help to deconstruct the mass of the building and suggested that architectural mechanisms could be used to further break down the form, particularly to the central “spine” of the guestroom wings running in the east/west axis. It was requested that the consideration of materials should also focus more closely on immediate contextual examples, i.e. within Bicester and Chesterton, rather than in Oxfordshire more generally.
- 2.6.16 In terms of the overall scale of the building it was noted that whilst the preliminary results of the LVIA had demonstrated that the buildings would not be visible from agreed sensitive viewpoints, the architecture should still be of high quality where visible on the Site, and effort made to break down the mass of the building in those views. I fully supported this approach.
- 2.6.17 A further pre-application meeting was held in early September 2019 a couple of weeks prior to the second public exhibition.
- 2.6.18 BMD and I collectively summarised the results of the previous meetings and the work done to address the comments received. In respect of the architectural design and with comments on the guestroom wings (which had been the focus of the discussion and feedback at the last two meetings) I presented a hierarchy

for the prominence for each elevation of the wings. We identified how this was used to define the materials and architectural characteristics of the wings themselves to address the appearance of this part of the building and to ensure that the highest quality materials were used in the most visually prominent areas. This responded directly to previous comments from officers on the nature and quality of the materials to be used. I presented our findings from studies of buildings and the local vernacular of both Bicester and Chesterton. We explained how this had been used to inform the choices of materials on the elevations, as well as the locations and extent of their use. BMD presented an update to their landscaping proposals.

2.6.19 We also explained how a specific concept and hierarchy of architectural form had been applied to give different parts of the guestrooms wings a unique character. This had been achieved by adopting a “manor house estate” typology, responding to the historical context of Bicester and other manor house estate layouts such as Kirtlington Manor Park, with it’s central manor house flanked by subsidiary buildings and with a long driveway approach. The tallest central part of the plan form would reflect the approach to a manor house, using very high-quality materials, such as stone, to match that used in the local area. This would give this part of the building an enhanced articulation, a grander appearance and the massing would be broken up by the changing roof ridge line of the central “spine” of this part of the building. This central section was then to be flanked by shorter “residences” that had a similar appearance, but with slightly simpler detailing, including exposed timber bracing. This would give a more modest feel to the element. The perimeter sections of the two guestroom wings would then be presented as timber clad buildings, so referencing a “stable” style form of architecture. They would be lower in height, with half-hipped roofs, and other timber features. I explained how the banding of different materials had been changed, creating “bays” of different materials separated vertically, so breaking down the horizontal emphasis I also explained how the roof pitches had generally been steepened so as to align with this architectural concept, with the roof overhangs reduced. I also explained how the detail of the guestroom window surrounds had been considered, so that the level of ornamentation of these differed in line with the conceptual hierarchy established. All of these changes responded to the specific comments received regarding the size, scale and massing of the building and its consequential appearance.

2.6.20 Officers agreed that the changes responded to the comments on elevational design and banding and that the increased pitch of the roofs was a more contextual approach. Amongst other things, they also agreed that the conceptual hierarchy for the guestroom wings helped to break down the mass of this element and that the local Bicester and Chesterton building studies and analysis had influenced the elevational design.

2.6.21 A further pre-application meeting was held in early October 2019 following the second public exhibition in late September. It was envisaged that this would be the final pre-application meeting prior to submission. A range of topics were presented and representatives from CDC and OCC were in attendance to discuss various matters.

2.6.22 In relation to design, the EPR team re-capped the discussions from the previous meeting and the progress made to address officer’s concerns on the appearance and perceived scale and mass of the hotel guestroom part of the building which had been their primary focus. We illustrated the contextual approach

that had been taken, referencing local building precedents, and the changes that had broken down the massing of this part of the building, through form, appearance and materials. We illustrated the window surround ornamentation used on buildings in the local area and how this was being used to inform the fine stone detailing of the proposed building. **See fig. 11.**

- 2.6.23 Officers considered that the change to a vertical “bay” emphasis had helped to break up the massing but expressed residual concerns on the general scale. We identified the potential to pair up the window positions on the guestroom elevations to provide a more composed elevational language to respond to previous comments about avoiding a monolithic or institutional appearance. This would also further reinforce the emphasis on the vertical “bays” created by the materials. I also noted that in design terms, an approach of hiding or disguising buildings altogether was not appropriate, but rather a contextual architectural response was the correct one, so that, where visible in the landscape setting on the Site, the architecture was of an appropriately high quality and, through the landscape led design approach, was glimpsed through the existing and proposed vegetation.
- 2.6.24 From this process, it should be clear that we developed the design of the building taking full account of the comments received where appropriate. I consider that we have demonstrated a full understanding of the architectural and landscape context and local vernacular, and responded appropriately to issues of height, scale and massing through the positioning of the building on the Site and the organisation of the functions and their respective heights. Through this process we have been able to produce a scheme which I consider to be a very high-quality design, informed by a thoroughly researched and collaborative approach, which has responded to the concerns raised.
- 2.6.25 Following this final pre-application meeting in early October, the application drawings, DAS and other supporting documents were prepared. They were submitted in support of the planning application to Cherwell District Council in November 2019 under Planning Application ref. 19/02550/F with the following description for the development:
“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”. Planning Application Form (CD1-1)

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE DESIGN

3.1 General

- 3.1.1 This section of my evidence should be read in conjunction with EPR’s Design and Access Statement (DAS) and the planning application drawings. I summarise the key principles of the scheme design.
- 3.1.2 The Proposed Development is an exciting opportunity to bring a unique family resort concept to the UK with a variety of entertainment experiences. I consider it presents a very high quality architectural design that

sits comfortably within the well concealed Site. The images in appendix 01 of this proof (“Final Planning Visuals”) illustrate the architectural design proposals.

3.2 Site wide organisation

- 3.2.1 The north west corner of the Site has been designed to contain an open area. This includes a public nature trail, the retained ponds, marsh areas and existing established trees and other vegetation. The existing landscape is enhanced with additional new ponds, new plant and tree species, lawn areas, and a network of pedestrian pathways providing a serene woodland walk through the area. These paths connect back to the outdoor amenity plaza immediately to the western side of the proposed building. The existing established vegetation along the boundary with the M40 and A4095 are retained to provide natural visual screening to the development.
- 3.2.2 The north-eastern part of the Site contains the main guest / customer car park (along with, small utilities housings for electrical sub-stations and some minor equipment to serve the below ground attenuation tank identified in the drainage strategy). The existing established vegetation along the eastern boundary with the A4095 is retained. It is further enhanced to provide visual screening of the car park from the A4095. New soft landscape features, including mounds, pond and new trees are proposed along the eastern boundary adjacent to the access road to the Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa. This area also contains part of the proposed diverted PRow. The area has been designed to enhance the experience for users of the PRow. It would provide them with a dedicated and safe green corridor route, shielded from the car park by a new hedgerow. The landscaping also serves to mitigate views of the car park for the two residential properties immediately to the east of the development Site, Vicarage Farm and Stableford House.
- 3.2.3 The main pedestrian and vehicular entrance to the Site is proposed along the A4095. The location for the entrance has been carefully determined through a robust assessment so as to respect the requirement for visibility splays and the proximity of other property entrances along the road. The pedestrian footway leading from Chesterton extends to the entrance of the new development. A crossover will allow users of the footway to continue their journey north-west along the A4095.
- 3.2.4 The car park is divided broadly into two halves, separated by an attractive tree lined central boulevard approach. This leads to the covered entrance drop off point with a “porte cochere” using a one-way system around a central pond and soft landscaped area. Lay-bys are provided around the central pond feature for shuttle bus drop off and pick up near to the main entrance. Wheelchair accessible parking bays within the car park are located closest to the main entrance, as well as dedicated guest and customer cycle parking
- 3.2.5 In each half of the main car park there are areas of soft landscaping containing existing retained trees. To the easternmost parking bays, a “grass-crete” area of part-soft landscaped surfacing is proposed to further enhance the landscape-led design of the car park, containing a provision for electric vehicle charging.

- 3.2.6 Along the southern edge of the Site, the service access road extends around to the back of the proposed building. Two small areas of car parking for staff are proposed near the service entrances into the building with pedestrian footways and a mix of hard and soft landscaping. All service vehicles will enter this area via this southern approach, turn around, and exit the same way. A dedicated route around the perimeter of the guest / customer car park is provided to avoid any cross over with guest / customer traffic.
- 3.2.7 The area immediately to the south of the development Site (currently the 10th fairway of the golf course) is within the application boundary but outside of Great Wolf operations. It is proposed to become a new landscaped buffer zone with new raised bunding, new species of planting, trees, and grassed areas. This will also serve to enhance biodiversity and provide additional habitat for local wildlife. It will also break up views of the buildings to the extent that they are visible from the south.
- 3.2.8 The area immediately to the north western side of the proposed buildings comprises an outdoor amenity plaza for guests and customers. Access to this area is via the FEC and the conference centre. An access track extends around the western perimeter of the building, parallel to the swales, for emergency vehicle use. Reference should be made to the proposed Site plan within the planning drawings, including drawing ref. “10875-ZZ-DR-TP-0102” and BMD’s landscape design proposals.

3.3 The Hotel

- 3.3.1 Guests will typically arrive at the porte cochere for luggage unloading. The covered area extends over the drop off one-way vehicle route. All guests and customers will enter through the main entrance and into the large double height lobby space. Check-in and the main reception area is located to the right-hand side, with back of house offices and support facilities behind that. To the left-hand side of the main lobby is the an ancillary retail area. A smaller provisions shop is located next to the reception, leading to the main guest elevator core serving the upper floor guestrooms. In the centre of the lobby is a large fireplace. A waiting area with seating is situated in front of the fireplace, and on the opposite side of the hearth is the “Camp Fire Zone”. This is an open plan space with soft furnishings, a display screen and presentation area. **See fig. 12.**
- 3.3.2 Diagonally opposite the “Camp Fire Zone” is the hotel’s main restaurant “Barnwood”. The restaurant is strategically located to offer good natural visual surveillance of the lobby and circulation areas so parents can easily observe their children. The restaurant includes a private dining room and bar.
- 3.3.3 Guestrooms are accessed either side of the central lobby space. They are located at ground, first, second and a partial third floor. The guestrooms wings extend symmetrically out from the main lobby reception area. This is designed to provide an equidistant route from the guestrooms to the central core. This minimises routes through the building for any one guestroom zone, particularly with young children, the elderly or those with mobility disabilities in mind. The guestroom wings run either side of a central corridor which runs perpendicular to the porte cochere and main lobby processional entrance. It then turns in a north easterly and south westerly direction to create two flanking wings. From a circulatory perspective the guestroom

- corridors are continuous from the main core and servicing centre. This ensures that guests do not need to exit to the outside to reach their guestrooms. This is a critical safety and operational feature of the resort.
- 3.3.4 The guestrooms themselves sleep between 4 and 8 persons. They are designed for families with children. The larger guestroom types allow for grandparents or other guardians to stay as well. The rooms are themed with the Great Wolf Lodge concept. They are also designed to offer an exciting experience for young children, with bunk beds inside “kid’s cabins” in some of the room types. **See fig. 13.**
- 3.3.5 The exterior appearance of the porte cochere and main entrance is illustrated on drawing “10875-XX-DR-TP-4101” in the pack of proposed planning drawings. It comprises a pitched roof canopy covering the drop off area supported on a timber frame structure, which includes feature curved timber bracing, curved haunches and other details. Atop the roof is a dove-cote feature. The roof is clad in dark red coloured roof tiles. Flanking the main entrance and pitched roof lobby are two single storey elements clad in stone. Traditional style rainwater hoppers and down pipes appear along the side elevations.
- 3.3.6 The external appearance of the guestrooms wings is presented in 3 complementary architectural styles. This is intended to echo the formal hierarchical layout arrangement of an English manor house estate in theme. The central section, immediately behind the lobby, is equivalent in hierarchy to the manor house itself, with facades completely clad in stone with quoins to external corners, stone window headers, jambs and cills, all presented in a traditional style. The roof is slightly raised above the flanking bays either side, with a steep duo pitch clad in red tile. Two projecting gables either side of the entrance lobby building provide symmetry and bookend the manor house, using a stone roof edge detail to the gable. An arrow slit detail in the upper portion of the gable end provides visual a focal point
- 3.3.7 After the break in the roof line created by the two adjacent gable turns in the roof, the flanking elements of the guestroom wings are characterised by a different style. These areas use grey roof tiles, instead of red, to distinguish the different roof elements. They are clad primarily in render, with punched window apertures and stone headers and cills. Projecting bays with gable roofs have a mix of timber or stone clad facades, with corresponding window surround detail and a range of coloured window frames to suit each condition. The windowpanes here are less ornate than for the manor house element, with fewer transoms and simpler surround detail. A continuous stone plinth runs around the base of this part of the building for weather proofing and robustness.
- 3.3.8 The third part of the guestroom component visually contrasts with the other two parts, being a storey shorter, and offset from the main roof ridge line and being L-shaped in plan. These elements are designed to emulate the ancillary buildings of a manor estate, such as stables, with the ridge and eaves lines broken up even more and with the footprint of the plan form being stepped. These elements are clad entirely in stained timber, with a small stone plinth around the base, again for weather proofing and robustness. Windows have simple timber head, cill and jamb details with corresponding frame colours. Gable ends feature expressed timber structural rafters, bracing and haunch details, supporting a half-hipped roof profile above.

3.3.9 Further details and illustrations of these three parts of the building can be found on the submitted planning drawings, refs “10875-XX-DR-TP-4102”, “10875-XX-DR-TP-4103”, “10875-XX-DR-TP-4104”, and “10875-XX-DR-TP-4105”.

3.4 The Family Entertainment Centre (FEC) and Conference Centre

3.4.1 The FEC connects the hotel to the waterpark. It sits immediately south of the hotel guestroom wings, lobby and restaurant. It is a single storey, but double height space in order to accommodate the programme of activities inside. The guest experience starts in the “Connector Zone”, where guests travel from the main hotel lobby and “Camp Fire Zone” through an internalised street. This street is themed to resemble a woodland walk with landscaping features (**see fig. 14**).

3.4.2 The Connector Zone leads to the main activity hall of the FEC. This central space is themed to represent a clearing in a forest, with décor to reflect this. It contains a high-level ropes course, mini-golf, and climbing wall. **See fig. 15**. All activities are scaled so that they can be used by younger children. Around the perimeter of the central space are a variety of food and beverage outlets of different sizes and cuisines. Other small themed activity attractions are provided including a miniature tenpin bowling alley (**See fig. 16**). The south-eastern side of the FEC connects through to a shared commercial kitchen. This connects to the large back of house and operations centre for the resort, including offices, staff facilities, storage, workshops and building services areas. This is all linked to the external delivery bays on the south-eastern side of the building. On the north-western side of the FEC is an entrance out to the outer amenity plaza.

3.4.3 Externally, the FEC is a flat roofed building with a step up in the centre to accommodate the taller requirements in the centre of the plan form (i.e. the ropes course and climbing wall). A back of house pedestrian bridge link over the roof provides direct access from the main kitchen on the south side to the conference centre kitchen on the north side. A large area on the flat roof is covered with a seeded living (green) roof. This is designed to be naturally irrigated by rainfall, and a suitable maintenance regime will ensure its longevity. It will contribute to the overall environmental sustainability for the project, whilst also providing pleasant visual amenity to those hotel guestrooms with a view to the south. It will also reinforce the massing concepts for the project, i.e. that the FEC building serves to create a break or gap between the two larger built forms, the hotel and the waterpark.

3.4.4 The south-eastern elevation of the FEC is largely not visible when viewed from immediately outside the Site. It is visually screened by the extended southerly projecting guestroom wing, the waterpark building and the proposed new planting and landscaping along the current 10th fairway. The elevations to this part of the FEC are consequentially simpler, with finishes and materials appropriate to an area with vehicles and service bay. A horizontal plinth band of buff coloured engineering brick follows the base of the building, with concrete panels above, and a render finish to the upper portion, above the operational zones. The north western elevations are public facing, continuing the architectural language of the porte cochere and main entrance facades. The exit doors are set into a larger window unit. Above the canopy, the remaining upper

part of the vertical face up to parapet level is clad in render. The stepped upper projections of the FEC (including the bridge link) are also clad in render.

3.4.5 The conference centre is located on the north-western side of the FEC. It is nestled between the northerly guestroom wing and the waterpark building. Access is via the main entrance lobby and foyer. The conference centre contains an informal pre-function space, banquet room, smaller meeting rooms, and dedicated toilet provision, plus other back of house facilities. The meeting rooms are designed to provide for a variety of events. A courtyard garden is located on the northern side of the conference centre.

3.4.6 The elevations of the conference centre also continue the architectural language of the porte cochere and main entrance facades. The canopy described above for the north western elevation of the FEC extends around the corresponding elevation of the conference centre, culminating in an entry feature and egress point into the ballroom pre-function space. This is signified by a pitched roof, timber-supported gable structure, with feature bracing and haunches, and dark grey roof tiles. A decorative flagpole is positioned on the ridge to provide a visual focal point. Further details can be found on the proposed planning drawing ref. "10875-XX-DR-TP-4106".

3.5 The Waterpark

3.5.1 The waterpark is the centrepiece attraction of a Great Wolf Resort. There are four main elements: the main waterpark building itself, the slide tower, the slides themselves (which extend out from the top of the slide tower and re-enter the main waterpark area at ground level), and the waterpark plant building. The latter houses the water filtration and air management systems, wave pool generator, offices, other back of house functions, and plant.

3.5.2 The main waterpark building is open plan internally. It encompasses an array of indoor activities, and connects through to some of the food and beverage outlets in the FEC. Customer changing facilities (including those for disabled users) are located here as well.

3.5.3 Externally the main waterpark building is proposed as a duo pitched roof structure clad in green coloured metal panels from the eaves line upward. On the south side of the roof is an array of photovoltaic panels. This assists in achieving a high level of sustainability for the scheme by providing a portion of energy for the resort from environmentally sustainable means. Between ground and eaves levels the building is clad in concrete panelling, with a stone plinth at the base. Large panellised windows are proposed to the two gable elevations to maximise natural light into the space within. On the southern gable elevation, projecting vertical metal louvres are proposed to manage solar gain. The northern gable end features two large fixed metal "barn door" panels. The general appearance echoes that of agricultural buildings commonly found in rural settings and the agricultural landscape. See also drawing "10875-XX-DR-TP-4107" from the proposed planning set.

- 3.5.4 The waterpark plant building is a two-storey rectangular building with a flat roof, connected to the southern side of the waterpark. As this is a service area and only accessible for maintenance personnel, the appearance is intended to be simple and honest in form. The rear elevation features a series of large ventilation louvres, required by the plant equipment inside.
- 3.5.5 The slide tower is clad in render to match the other rendered areas of the building, with a green coloured clad duo-pitched roof to match the rest of the waterpark building.
- 3.5.6 The water slides offer a range of slide experiences aimed at younger children, they are constructed from reinforced plastic sections and are proposed in a variety of colours.

3.6 Public Realm Improvements

- 3.6.1 There are several areas both within and without the application boundary where significant improvements are proposed to enhance the experience for the wider public.
- 3.6.2 As detailed above, the area to the north west corner of the Site is proposed to be re-landscaped. It will provide an open space with a public nature trail accessible from access points along the A4095. This area was previously not available to be used by the public as it was part of the private golf course.
- 3.6.3 The PRow is proposed to be diverted north-eastwards along the eastern perimeter of the Site on a dedicated path with surrounding soft landscaping. It joins up with A4095, where it connects with a newly proposed foot and cycleway that will now extend westwards towards the M40 flyover and the onward connections to the PRow north of the A4095. This foot and cycleway is also proposed to extend eastwards along the A4095 into Chesterton village. The proposed main entrance into the development includes for road widening along the A4095 and a new dedicated right turn lane into the Site.

4.0 RESPONSES TO REASON FOR REFUSAL 4

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The planning application ref. 19/02550/F was refused by CDC following a planning committee in March 2020. CDC provided six reasons for refusal, with one relating partly to matters of architectural design (reason 4), as it states:

“The development proposed, by virtue of its considerable size, scale and massing and its location in the open countryside beyond the built limits of the village of Chesterton, along with its institutional appearance, incongruous design, and associated levels of activity including regular comings and goings, will cause significant urbanisation and unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the rural setting of the village and the amenities enjoyed by users of the public right of way, and would fail to reinforce local distinctiveness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the

Cherwell Local Plan (2011-2031) Part 1, Saved Policies C8 and C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.” Ref. Planning Decision Notice 19/02550/F (CD3-1).

- 4.1.2 Matters relating to the landscape design and landscape visual impact of the Proposed Development are addressed in detail by Richard Waddell in his Landscape Proof of Evidence
- 4.1.3 The following focusses on the alleged extent of “urbanisation”, alleged impact on the character and appearance of the area and local distinctiveness in the context of the architectural design of the Proposed Development
- 4.1.4 Before turning to consider the respective parts of what are asserted with which I strongly disagree, it is worth noting that the Proposed Development is for delivery of the first Great Wolf Lodge in the UK. The resort naturally requires buildings of a certain size and a layout of a certain scale in a location outside an urban area. The resort is designed to provide a fantastic hospitality destination, offering a dynamic and unrivalled entertainment experience, with a variety of exciting attractions in one location bringing families together for a unique and fun leisure experience at a holiday destination in the UK (rather than abroad). The architecture of the Proposed Development has evolved during the inception of the project to deliver the required ingredients, but in a way which respects and responds sensitively and appropriately to the local context.
- 4.1.5 I believe that the scheme proposed for this particular Site and location will deliver a sustainable, very high quality architectural and placemaking scheme which is entirely appropriate to that location, its setting, and the wider local landscape. It has been designed, having regard to all aspects of its surroundings, including the location next to the M40 motorway, the golf course, the nearby village of Chesterton, along with the other surrounding areas.
- 4.1.6 The design has been influenced from the outset by the objective of delivering a sensitive massing and articulation for the built form, whilst incorporating attractive and appealing routes through the Site for both the public and guests in a landscape-driven design.
- 4.1.7 As reported in EPR’s Design Report which accompanied the Appellant’s Statement of Case (CD12-2) at Appendix 5, the appeal scheme was the result of almost a year of design development with a team of design consultants, including in particular the landscape consultant BMD, and including,

‘a series of pre-application discussions with CDC, discussions with key local stakeholders, and two multiple-day public consultations. Careful consideration was given to the impact of the proposals on the local area in architectural terms, in respect of its appearance, layout, character and the routing of the Public Right of Way (PRoW).

- *The design ethos was one of a landscape-led approach, where the existing and proposed landscape design strategy was integral to informing the built architectural response.*

- *The proposed building design is heavily influenced by the local architectural vernacular in terms of materiality, character, and style. Effective and appropriate access to the site has been incorporated.*
- *The architectural proposal is complemented by an exceptional landscape design proposal, which includes a publicly accessible nature trail with enhanced biodiversity, plant species, and soft landscape features which do not currently exist on the site.* [EPR Design Report - Para 3.1]

4.2 Character and Appearance of the Area:

4.2.1 Reference is made in the reason for refusal to the character and appearance of the area, although there is no particular analysis of this in the reason for refusal itself. The character and appearance of the area is addressed in more detail in the evidence of Richard Waddell, but it had also been carefully considered in the architectural design. The Site lies immediately adjacent the M40 motorway, bounded by this road and the A4095 to the north with the Bicester Golf Club and Spa buildings, and two private dwellings to the east of the Site. More generally, the surrounding area beyond contains the village of Chesterton, and north of Little Chesterton contains a network of arterial road routes connecting the various settlements and the M40. As noted in EPR's Design Report:

- *'The site currently accommodates the back nine holes of Bicester Golf Club and Spa. This is already a managed, rather than natural or agricultural landscape, with established vegetation around the perimeter.'* [EPR Design Report - Para 3.1]

4.2.2 The overall concept for the development of the Site and the location of the building within it, as noted in section 2 of this proof, was based on creating a richly layered landscape design within which the building will be sensitively located. As described in the EPR Design Report:

- *'Working with the existing peripheral vegetation, this creates a natural first layer of screening of the development. Within this, additional vegetation and soft landscape features are proposed as a result of work with the landscape architect. This will provide a second layer of screening of direct views of the building.'*
- *The car park area will also be subject to its own detailed landscaping and it is deliberately positioned nearest the entrance to the site in order to assist in setting the building itself well away from the site entrance, deep into the planned area.*
- *Within this area set well within the site, the positioning of the various parts of the building has been chosen so as to orientate and locate the tallest and largest elements deep within the site, well away from any sensitive viewpoints.'* [EPR Design Report - Para 4.1]

4.2.3 The effect of this strategy has been to ensure that at every point of the approach experience, the building is only eventually revealed once within the Site, responding sensitively to the local context. Further detail on this approach can be found in the Design and Access Statement (CD 1-7).

4.3 Size, Scale and Massing:

4.3.1 Reference is made in reason for refusal 4 to the development's alleged "considerable size, scale and massing". Whilst the development necessarily involves 47,940sqm of gross internal floorspace disposed in buildings of between 14 and 22.5m in height, the size, scale and massing of the buildings are entirely appropriate to the form of development proposed and, more fundamentally, the area of land in question within which the built form sits. The resort building is located very comfortably within the Site with more than sufficient space around it to accommodate the size and scale and massing of the building itself.

4.3.2 The overall footprint of the resort building on plan is that of a single building (as required for the functional brief for this type of leisure facility). In plan form, therefore, it is necessarily larger than (for example) buildings in Chesterton village. That is as one would expect it to be. In terms of actual appearance and perception, however, the size of the building is broken down by varying the proposed heights, giving the effect of making one building appear as a series of smaller buildings and representing an appropriate and contextual response to the existing smaller local built form density.

4.3.3 The height and massing of the building (including the taller elements) has also evolved considerably during the pre-application discussions. The final proposal represents a smaller building than that originally proposed. As described in the Design Report:

- *'It has a well-articulated massing, appropriate both in principle for what is proposed, but also providing a high degree of architectural quality in the detailed design. The proposals respond to the traditional form, scale and massing of buildings in the area (as summarised below). Even though the building is not actually visible in relation to its neighbours in Chesterton (as demonstrated by the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)). [EPR Design Report - Para 3.1]*

4.3.4 The height of the first of the three parts of the building (comprising the hotel guestroom wings) achieves a balance between the need for a certain height of building to accommodate these wings, with the overall scale of the development. Through the iterative design process with the landscape architect, and through pre-application discussions with CDC, a part three and part four storey hotel has been chosen which creates a balance between a building that is not too high but also one that that is not too expansive on plan. As EPR's Design Report describes:

- *'The local context is respected by delivering the height requirements by breaking down the building into two sub parts (one at three and one at four storeys). This will reduce the perceived massing. This part of the building also uses varying roof ridge and eaves heights, stepped facades in and out, with a variety of materials to break up the elevations, and correspondingly composed bays of fenestration.'* [EPR Design Report - Para 3.3].

This has the visual effect of breaking up the building into several smaller elements. Further details on how this responds to the local north Oxfordshire vernacular are identified below.

4.3.5 The second part of the building is the water park element. The nature of this part of the building, with its water slide tower, is the anchor of the Great Wolf Lodge experience designed it in conjunction with

specialist consultants with international expertise. The slide tower is necessarily of a certain height in order to facilitate the use of the water slides. As noted in the Design Report:

- *'This represents a basic part of the brief and the leisure experience. This part of the building has been located deep into the site, surrounded by layers of screening, the success of which becomes clear when considered from viewpoints agreed with the local planning authority.'*
- *Studies showed that similar sized buildings in the area are typically of an agricultural typology, for example barns and stables. The proposed architecture for this building therefore follows that general typology in terms of the proposed massing, appearance, materiality and character.'* [EPR Design Report - Para 4.2]

The result is a part of the scheme which sits comfortably in the surrounding landscape and responds positively to the setting and character of the area, albeit it is very well-screened in any event from any viewers outside the Site.

4.3.6 The third part of the building is the Family Entertainment Centre (FEC) and conference centre. This element is single storey, but with a double height space. This lowest part of the development massing is designed to act as a separator between the two other necessarily larger parts of the development. With the help of the proposed landscaping strategy, sensitive plant services screening, and a large area of green (seeded) roof, this reinforces the appearance of two separate buildings (water park and hotel building) when viewed from further away. EPR's Design Report describes how this massing relates to the immediate context of Chesterton village:

- *'The LVIA demonstrates that the building will not be visible from agreed viewpoints from Chesterton village. Accordingly, any perceived difference in size, scale or massing from buildings in Chesterton itself is not one which will be experienced from Chesterton or with buildings in Chesterton in view. The LVIA demonstrates the success of this approach and, in contradiction of the allegations made in the reason for refusal, that the design will not cause any material harm to the character of that area.'* [EPR Design Report - Para 5.5]

4.3.7 The overall effect of the size, scale and massing of the proposed architecture, by virtue of the conscious design choices made, is a building which does not appear as a single mass, but one which:

- is broken down with a varied roofscape and massing.
- does not create an urban characteristic.
- is not visually intrusive, nor harmful,
- does not detract from the characteristics of the surrounding landscape.

Further details on this can be found within the DAS and LVIA.

4.4 Location in the Open Countryside:

4.4.1 Reference is also made in the reason for refusal to the building being in open countryside. As a matter of fact, the Appeal Site is in the countryside (albeit a golf course). But simply stating this fact does not address the characteristics of the Site in this location which make it the ideal location for the Proposed Development (in all respects). The way in which adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the countryside are avoided can be seen from the results of the LVIA. It is also evident from the LVIA that whilst the Site is classified as being in the open countryside, the Site does not have an “open character” and the interior of the Site is largely screened from surrounding viewpoints by existing vegetation and the existing topography profile. The reason for refusal also fails to address the basic point that any Proposed Development of this kind naturally has to be located in what is likely to be classed in policy terms as open countryside for a number of different reasons, but this fact does not equate to the creation of harm. Leaving aside the ideal nature of the location in terms of geographical requirements and a location which will make it easy to access (dealt with by others), if one simply concentrates on the location in design terms, and its effect on the countryside, it can be seen that the appeal Site is particularly well-suited to accommodate the resort with its constituent buildings and the designed landscape around it. As described in the EPR Design report:

- *‘It is located in a naturally well-concealed part of the “open countryside”.*
- *It is a site already used for leisure purposes as a golf course.*
- *It has more than sufficient space to accommodate the footprint of the building within a generous landscaped setting. The nature of the site means visitors will be able to appreciate the buildings that make up part of the visitor experience within a countryside setting that is part of its attraction.*
- *At the same time, the Proposed Development is very well-screened, ensuring it will not have any wider undue visual intrusion on the open countryside or important natural features. Indeed, the inclusion of the publicly accessible nature trail with proposed enhanced biodiversity, illustrates the advantages that the site and its location has to offer for both visitors and the local community. [EPR Design Report – Para 5.1]*

4.4.2 The Site already has an established commercial leisure use, as a golf course. It is also located in close proximity to the edge of a growth settlement (Bicester). It is a privately owned and a managed landscape. It has already been altered to suit the golf club’s requirements, rather than being natural countryside. Golf courses do not read in the same way as open countryside in terms of character and appearance. Moreover, the landscape design proposals for Proposed Development will also create elements of countryside within the development itself which are not currently present and which will be able to be enjoyed by users of the Site in a positive way, as compared with the more limited use of the golf course holes on the Site currently.

4.4.3 Owing to its location next to the M40 and with the surrounding vegetation in the area, it is almost entirely shielded from view from places like Chesterton. The location of the scheme does not result in any “undue harm” to the open countryside. The success of the Proposed Development in respecting and not intruding on the wider character of the countryside, as can be seen from the assessed effects set out in the LVIA. The secluded nature of the development also means that it has no impact on the local distinctiveness of the village or local area, as explained further below.

4.5 Beyond the Built Limits of the Village of Chesterton:

4.5.1 Reference is made in the reason for refusal to the development Appeal Site's location beyond the built limits of the village of Chesterton. The locational benefits of the appeal Site in terms of sustainability are dealt with by others. However, from a design perspective, I consider that reference to the development Site being beyond the built limits of Chesterton itself makes no sense as a criticism, or as a basis for a reason for refusal in design terms. As stated in the EPR design report:

- *'It is a virtue of the development Site that it lies close to, but outside the built limits of the village of Chesterton. It is ideally sited in such a location because it offers the benefits of connectivity at the same time as providing visual seclusion from Chesterton itself, using existing vegetation and landscape enhancements. This provides the ability to accommodate the proposed built form without having any material adverse impact on the village of Chesterton. The site is ideal in this respect in having the ability to conceal the building from the village, thus preventing any legitimate concerns of visual impact on the village, or any harm to the character of the village, along with the prevention of any perception of alleged urbanisation.'* [EPR Design Report – para 6.1]

4.6 Alleged Institutional Appearance:

4.6.1 Reference is made in the reason for refusal to an alleged institutional appearance of the architectural proposal. I consider this to be unjustified. As noted above, the architectural proposal divides the building into three distinct parts, each with their own character, materiality, height, scale and massing. The way in which the term institutional is used is not explained, but I do not consider it is justified and if it is being suggested there is some kind of rigid uniformity, or dull / drab appearance, I consider this is also unjustified. I consider these points further in turn.

4.6.2 Some concerns were originally expressed during the pre-application discussions that the hotel guestroom part of the building, in its earlier design form, was too monolithic and repetitive in appearance. The EPR team and I responded to this criticism by introducing into the architectural proposal the varying roofscapes, changes in direction of the plan form, a range of roof ridge and eaves heights, a varied palette of materials, and fenestration composed in bays rather than uniformly separated.

4.6.3 A deliberately varied and strong architectural concept has been introduced and applied to give the building its own design integrity and interest. The design concept with regard to the hotel wings (from where the concern of institutional appearance was directed during the pre-application discussions) has been to create a hierarchy of three buildings using the typology of the country manor estate, as described in the EPR Design report:

- *'[...] with a central "manor house" typology comprised in the tallest part of the building, where very high quality materials will be used, such as stone, to match that used in the local area. This will give this part of the building an enhanced articulation and a grander appearance.'*

- *These elements are then flanked by shorter “residences” that have a similar appearance, but with slightly simpler detailing including exposed timber bracing, to give a more modest feel, coupled with a variety of façade materials.*
- *The residences are then themselves flanked by timber clad “stable” style architecture; these are shorter still, with hipped roofs, and other features associated with more agricultural buildings. The pairing of windows and the composition of the fenestration generally avoids any regimented or institutional appearance.*
- *The overall effect is that of a collection of buildings, situated symmetrically around a central focal point, with architectural variety but a harmonious common theme.’ [EPR Design Report – Para 7.3]*

Further details of this concept and illustrations of the design development process can be found in the DAS. The buildings are therefore designed to serve their purpose and use, but I reject the idea that the resulting experience of the design results in some any institutional appearance in the negative sense that the reason for refusal appears to be suggesting.

4.7 Alleged Incongruous Design:

4.7.1 There is an allegation in the reason for refusal that the design is “incongruous”. This criticism is not explained or amplified. It is not clear with what the design is said to be incongruous. Nor is it clear from where this alleged incongruity would be appreciated. If it is a criticism that is made in respect of a comparison with the design of buildings in Chesterton village, then it is misplaced because the design was developed specifically with the local architecture in mind. As mentioned in the EPR Design Report:

- *‘ [...] studies of buildings in Chesterton, Bicester, and surrounding regions have informed the architectural characteristics of the proposal. Window patterns, sizes and surrounds, façade materials, roof profiles, styles, proportions, height and scale were all taken into consideration and translated into an architectural composition that responded to these elements whilst not being unnecessarily fussy. The use of timber, render, and local stone as façade materials break up the elevations and reference the materials used on buildings within Chesterton, Bicester and the locality, along with steeply pitched roofs and gables with minimal overhangs. ’ [EPR Design Report – Para 8.1]*

4.7.2 As explained earlier the architecture of the proposal also follows a strong conceptual narrative which ensures there is integrity to the scale of the building. It provides an authentic and cohesive design for the resort of this kind, legitimately augmented by the references to local character and architectural style described.

4.7.3 For the water park building, as noted above and in the EPR Design report:

- *‘ [...] aside from the slides themselves (which are located away from agreed sensitive viewpoints) the local architectural vernacular of buildings of similar size and scale have been referenced, e.g. barns and other agricultural buildings, so that this part of the building will not be incongruous when viewed in the proposed setting. ’ [EPR Design Report – Para 8.1]*

4.7.4 The effect of other developments outside settlements in the local area have been considered. These are varied in the local area and include developments such as the industrial complex outside of Little Chesterton, Bicester Avenue Garden Centre and Tesco Bicester. All of these developments are significantly more visible than the Proposed Development. However, as a matter of principle it illustrates the fact that developments of a certain size are not inherently incongruous in terms of size, scale and massing.

4.7.5 As already noted, the LVIA demonstrates the minimal visual impact of the Proposed Development on the immediate context of Chesterton and beyond. I consider a complaint of incongruity ought to be expressed with some reference point as to from where such incongruity would be experienced and with what the building is said to be incongruous but neither explanation has been given by CDC. The EPR design report makes it clear that:

- *'[...] Far from being incongruous in terms of design response, my architectural approach has been one of creating harmony with the locality, with consistent design characteristics used across the different elements of the scheme. Although the building will not be visible in the majority of instances, even where visible the architecture will present a sensitive and contextual response which is in keeping with the local vernacular of north Oxfordshire.'* [EPR Design Report – Para 8.5]

4.8 Levels of Activity ('comings and goings'):

4.8.1 Reference is made to the levels of activities and the "comings and goings" associated with the use. The actual levels in question both in terms of the existing golf club use and their levels, are dealt with in more detail by the Appellant's traffic consultants, Motion. However, in terms of effect on the overall character of the area from an architectural design perspective, the A4095 and surrounding arterial routes are already characterised by "comings and goings" as they are main roads. As stated in the EPR Design report:

- *'[...] These roads serve their intended purpose to connect different settlements and amenities in the area. The additional traffic created by the Proposed Development will not alter this general characteristic. The scheme deliberately only proposes one access into the site for all modes of transport, thus minimising any effect on the surrounding roads. Vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians will all enter the site on the A4095, which is an entirely appropriate location for that road's designation. The anticipated levels of activity and the comings and goings are commensurate with the level of activity expected on an A road designation.'* [EPR Design Report – Para 9.1]

4.8.2 The location of the entrance along the A4095 has also been carefully designed to enable the delivery of required visibility splays, creating an acceptable relationship with the location of other nearby junctions, with other properties' entrances, the village of Chesterton and the motorway flyover. The location of the entrance of the Proposed Development is outside of Chesterton village. Most comings and goings will also be outside of the village, so incapable of impacting on the overall character of the area. The Transport Assessment (CD1-24) demonstrates that the proposed Site access junction from the A4095 will operate within capacity with negligible queuing or vehicle delay.

4.9 Alleged “Significant Urbanisation”:

4.9.1 The reason for refusal alleges that the effects identified above will result in “significant urbanisation”. Again, this criticism is not justified nor properly explained. It is also not stated from where any such alleged urbanisation will be experienced. In addition to the points already made as to the relevant lack of visibility of the Proposed Development from the surrounding areas, the concept of urbanisation is simply not applicable to what is proposed anyway.

4.9.2 First of all, the Proposed Development does not have any particular characteristics of urban development akin to (for example) a housing estate, retail park, or business park, where there are typically multiple separate buildings with multiple owners or tenants, in a variety of configurations and adjacencies, connected via a shared, usually public, network of infrastructure. As highlighted in the EPR Design report:

- *‘[...] Such developments also often attract additional development to nearby surrounding areas to support these occupiers such as shops, doctors’ surgeries, and restaurants. This form of development can often result in urbanisation. The Proposed Development, by contrast, is self-supporting in this regard and does not have any of those characteristics and it is set within its own very generous and well-designed landscaped setting.’* [EPR Design Report – Para 10.2]

4.9.3 Operationally and in terms of land use, the resort similarly does not have the qualities, or feel, of an urban environment. It is centred around one building, owned and operated by one company but in a way which will have its own atmosphere as a leisure resort in a rural location, set within an integral landscape that forms a fundamental part of the overall development. The resort will be managed to time arrivals, deliveries and collections as set out elsewhere in the application documentation. The pattern of activity is not continual, but rather characteristic of a leisure destination within the countryside.

4.9.4 Architecturally, the building has been massed and articulated to present itself as a series of buildings (water park, hotel, FEC), broken down into distinct bays with different characters as noted above. It has aspects of a campus type resort set in a countryside location with its own natural landscaping. It does not have characteristics associated with a city, town, or village, or any other urban or urbanising environment. The EPR Design Report states that:

- *‘The architecture is composed and symmetrical and the building functions as one entity, sited in a very generous landscape setting. The latter forms an important part of the overall environment. All of this is very much at odds with the characteristics of an urban environment. Contrary to what is alleged, neither the proposed building design, nor the overall Proposed Development, creates any harm to the character of the area in terms of alleged urbanisation.’* [EPR Design Report – Para 10.4]

4.10 Alleged “unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area”

4.10.1 As I have already foreshadowed, the reason for refusal also suggests that there would be “unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area”. There is no substance to this suggestion. There is a

detailed assessment of the effect of the proposal on the landscape character and appearance, as well as of any visual impacts in the LVIA. This demonstrates the absence of any material harm to the character and appearance of the area when properly analysed. The allegation is contradicted by the LVIA. The reason for refusal does refer to the “rural setting of the village” and amenities enjoyed by users of the PRow and “local distinctiveness”, but none of these references actually articulates or expresses criticism of how the development would create any impact on the village. As described in the EPR Design report:

- *‘ The Rural Setting Of The Village:*

The site lies over 400m to the west of Chesterton village, with the eastern nine holes of the Bicester Golf Course lying between the village and the Site.

The eastern part of the village is designated as a Conservation Area and displays a rural character, as described in the Chesterton Conservation Area Appraisal (January 2008), with much of this part of the village dating before the 19th Century. CDC correctly do not allege any harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- *The western part of the village is undesignated - comprised of 20th Century infill development - that presents much more of a sub-urban character, with varying architectural style, materiality and extensive use of non-native ornamental planting to front and rear gardens. This character is in contrast to that of the adjacent Conservation Area; however, the degree of enclosure surrounding the village, combined with the extent of mature vegetation throughout the village, limits any degradation on areas that express a more rural character. [EPR Design Report – Para 11.2-11.4]*

4.10.2 As described in the Conservation Area Appraisal, *“The village sits on relatively flat land. The area rises gradually from 70m in the south east to 80m in the north west. The result of this topography is that views out of the conservation area are few if any and that the area contains no sweeping panoramas.”* [EPR Design Report – 11.4]

4.10.3 This principle is evident on the north west side of the village and extends out into the surrounding landscape, where extensive vegetation on the eastern nine holes of the Bicester Golf Course and on the southern half of Bignell Park (including the Chesterton Belt alongside the A4095) provide extensive separation between the village and the proposals.

4.10.4 The LVIA describes and represents (in photographic and other form) the extent of enclosure to the Site and the well vegetated nature of the surrounding context. This substantially constrains the potential influence of the proposals on all views and the surrounding landscape character (including that of Chesterton Village) to that of the relatively immediate vicinity of the Site. As noted in the LVIA, there are no views from Chesterton village or any other settlements in the surrounding landscape.

4.10.5 The strong degree of enclosure to the Site was recognised by CDC officers previously. The Landscape Officer noted *“Because the site is visually contained by boundary hedgerow and trees the development will*

be mainly experienced from the site's interior, from the perspective of visitors and visual receptors using the PRoW" noting also that "the site has a low landscape sensitivity to change." [EPR Design Report – Para 11.4]

4.10.6 Regarding the potential for any views from the direction of Chesterton village, a viewpoint for the corner of the A4095 and The Hale (LVIA Viewpoint 5) was identified. This has been overlaid with a wireline of the proposals (prepared independently by visualisation company Vista3D), to illustrate any potential visibility of the proposals from this closest edge of the village. This wireline is contained in LVIA Appendix 13.8 and shows the nature of the local topography and significant extent of intervening vegetation which precludes any potential visibility of the scheme from the village, or any influence on its rural character.

4.10.7 The design proposal is not intended to be part of the village, but rather a well-designed, well-concealed countryside resort which is well-located close to Chesterton village, but without having any adverse effect on it.

4.11 Amenities Enjoyed By The Users Of The Right Of Way:

4.11.1 The reason for refusal appears to suggest that the development will cause significant urbanisation of, and unacceptable harm to, the amenities enjoyed by the users of the Public Right of Way (PRoW). Again, I do not consider there to be any proper basis for suggesting this. On the contrary, the Proposed Development will actually provide an improved experience for users of the Right of Way (which is currently seldom used), as well as an additional publicly accessible nature trail.

4.11.2 The EPR Design Report clearly sets out the existing and proposed routes for the PRoW:

- *'[...] The current route of the PRoW enters the Site on the southeast side, cuts directly across the golf course, and exits the Site on the A4095 near to the motorway flyover. The proposed new routing retains the entry point in its existing location, but then diverts the route along the eastern boundary of the Site, up to the A4095, where it then connects to a dedicated pedestrian and cycle route which continues on to the entrance of the Proposed Development, heading west. From here users continue a short distance alongside the A4095 to the previous exit point near the motorway flyover. Users can also choose to enter the Site at the main entrance and enjoy the benefits of the publicly accessible nature trail included within the proposals.'* [EPR Design Report – Para 11.11]
- *The re-directed route through the eastern part of the Site is proposed with a series of landscape features designed to enhance the user's experience and mitigate views of the Proposed Development, offering privacy, ease of movement, resting places, greater accessibility, a greater variety of vegetation species and biodiversity, all designed to grow naturally over time, and results in a dedicated route free from interference by other enterprises.'* [EPR Design Report – Para 11.12]

4.11.3 Moreover it has been demonstrated through survey work that there is a very small number of current users of this existing PRow. Any impact on the existing experience will be on a small number of people, but I would expect the new PRow to be far more attractive and more beneficial to existing and future users.

4.11.4 The proposed new routing will create a more suitable, better protected, more easily accessible, more enjoyable amenity than is currently provided. The current route requires users to walk through the golf course. This creates a direct conflict of use and presents certain health and safety risks to both PRow users and the golf club members, not to mention nuisance for the latter. The Proposed Development will bring about positive benefits by addressing these problems. The allegation also completely ignores the significant benefits that the Proposed Development brings with the publicly accessible nature trail included within the proposals as an additional amenity resource for the local community.

4.12 Local Distinctiveness:

4.12.1 The reason for refusal alleges that the proposal development will “fail to reinforce local distinctiveness”. Again, this allegation is not properly explained and founded. For the reasons explained above, the secluded nature of the Site and its landscape mean that the scheme is not generally visible in the context of the nearest settlement, Chesterton village, so it is difficult to see what criticism is being made. As noted in the EPR Design report:

- *[..] The scale of development will be imperceptible from Chesterton and therefore, in terms of appearance, ambience, environment, and the unique character and rarity of the village, the scheme does not adversely affect its local distinctiveness. [EPR Design Report – Para 12.3]*

4.12.2 As to open countryside generally, it has been demonstrated in the LVIA that the Proposed Development is largely not visible from agreed viewpoints, especially when considered in the medium and long term views when proposed vegetation has established itself. It is highlighted in the EPR Design report that:

- *[..] Where the building is visible (for example from the M40 and on the flyovers of the A4095 and Green Lane), these are dynamic views only experienced for a relatively short period of time by users of the strategic road network, where the building is only momentarily visible. When assessing the view of the water slides, slide tower and water park building from the M40, again the LVIA demonstrates in viewpoint 4 that the visible part of the building is minimal, and as this view is elevated from the M40, the view at motorway level would reduce visibility of the development even further.*

[..] Set against the experience of travelling along the M40 itself, there are other examples of developments which are far more obviously visible and draw attention. There is therefore no material impact on the local distinctiveness of the open countryside by the Proposed Development. [EPR Design Report – Para 12.3]

4.12.3 The area around Bicester and Chesterton is characterised by arterial traffic routes connecting to the M40, and to other leisure and retail destinations in and around Bicester. The Transport Assessment describes how the Proposed Development utilises these existing routes and thereby reinforcing this aspect of the local distinctiveness of the area.

- 4.12.4 In terms of the scheme's scale and Site arrangement (i.e.resort with outdoor car parking), there are many similar examples of such arrangements (namely stand-alone retail operations) in and around the Bicester area, as noted earlier in this document. These are far more visually prominent than the Proposed Development. The scale of the proposal is also consistent with the environment and ambience of this general local area as illustrated already.
- 4.12.5 As to the scheme's architectural appearance, as noted above, the design draws inspiration heavily from the character and materials of locally distinctive buildings in the area. There is a significant use of local stone, which roots the development in its context. The undulating roofscapes provide variation to the height of the building reducing its bulk and mass and the changes in material and stepping of the facades distinguish different building elements, adding interest to the form whilst maintaining a unity of design and not being fussy in detail. The architectural design works in harmony with the existing established woodland and landscape features, as well as the proposed soft landscape enhancements, which in itself serves to reinforce the local landscape distinctiveness of the area. As the proposed building sits in the landscape without visual detriment to the landscape setting, it helps to reinforce that local landscape distinctiveness.
- 4.12.6 The Proposed Development does not detract from the local distinctiveness of the open countryside, Chesterton village, or the wider Bicester area, and is in fact in accordance with it in a number of different ways.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The Proposed Development is designed to provide a fantastic hospitality destination, offering families a dynamic and unrivalled entertainment experience. It will provide a variety of exciting attractions in one location, bringing families together for a unique, fun experience in the UK (rather than travelling abroad).
- 5.2 I believe that the architectural response is of a very high quality, with careful consideration given to a design that is landscape-led in approach. It has undergone an iterative design process, responding to the local context in all aspects, such as the size and scale of buildings in the surrounding area, drawing on local architecture and vernacular, responding to the setting in the open countryside, agreeing viewpoints and using existing topography and vegetation to enhance the landscape setting. The development proposals respond to the specific constraints and opportunities of the appeal Site, deliver the required functional brief, whilst respecting the local character of its surroundings.
- 5.3 The proposed building uses a varied palette of high quality materials, profiles and styles, that will sit comfortably and contextually in the landscape, and will provide a robust and appropriate architectural narrative that reinforces local distinctiveness and is infused with local references.

- 5.4 Considerable care has been taken to adapt and enhance public amenity for the Site, based on a locally sensitive strategy for how the Site is accessed, as well as providing landscape enhancements and additional public benefit through use and enjoyment of the Site.
- 5.5 The Proposed Development will not therefore result in any of the adverse effects alleged in the reason for refusal, but rather deliver significant and substantial benefits overall.