

Mr P Brain
Bicester Golf Committees' Chairman
c/o Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa
Chesterton
Bicester
OX26 1TE

S R G Baird BA (Hons) MRTPI
Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

10 January 2021

Dear Sir,

Objection from the golf committees and golf members at Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa to the development by Great Lakes UK Ltd at Bicester Golf Club, Chesterton. Appeal ref. APP/C3105/W/20/3259189

My name is Paul Brain, I am chairman of the golf members' committees at Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa (BHGS). The golf committees represent the golf members and are headed by the ladies', men's and seniors' captains.

I write on behalf of:

- The club captains namely, Ladies Captain - Roberta Miles, Men's Captain - Richard Topliss, Senior's Captain - Dave Scott.
- The ladies' and men's golf committees
and
- The golf club members.

We have reviewed the appeal documentation submitted by Great Wolf and also the England Golf report commissioned by the appellant and provide comments as follows which are to be used to support Parishes Against Wolf's 'PAW' objection on the loss of the golf course.

Bicester Golf Club, formerly Chesterton Golf and Country Club is a long-standing community and a far-reaching club of 50 years, it has an active membership of men, ladies, seniors and juniors of around 225 members. I can confirm Great Wolf has made no attempt to engage with the golf club at any stage. The lack of consultation on what will have a material impact on our society is very disappointing. We have not even been advised on the layout and plans of the proposed new course.

The golf club with its 18-hole golf course is a vibrant and social club with much to offer to the members and local community. Each year there are approximately 175 internal competitions, 47 matches against other clubs and £10,000 raised for local charities. The benefits of this club extend to the large numbers of visiting golfers, single groups, golf societies, charity events and community groups who pay fees to play.

The 2019 accounts of Bicester Hotel Limited contain a strategic report dated 3 June 2020 that refers to golf "continuing to thrive" having reopened after the March 2020 lockdown. Golf members contribute to the accommodation, food and drink revenue streams at the hotel in addition to their membership and green fees.

It should be noted that when the members were first advised of the original Great Wolf development the membership declined as members realised that the proposed development would destroy the course and Club and, that when the Planning Application was rejected, the membership numbers increased once more as the Club's future seemed to be secure.

There has been little or no effort on behalf of BHGS to recruit new golf members, albeit offers have been made by captains and committees to assist and discuss the way forward to increase membership. This has led to a Club which is under utilising the opportunities of the golf facilities and BHGS would be better placed to invest in growing the club rather than disposing of a valuable local asset.

Two local courses have recently closed (Magnolia Park and Carswell) with two others are facing imminent closure (North Oxford and Waterstock). This demise is not due to a lack of members or visitors but due to commercial or residential development. The closure of these clubs has and will put more pressure on the remaining clubs in the area and making it even more important to preserve the golfing facility at BHGS.

The suggestion of a 9-hole golf course in place of the existing 18-hole course would mean the membership would reduce, as already demonstrated when the planned development was first announced, putting the long-term future of the golf club in severe doubt. The club competitions and inter club competitions would not be sustainable on a 9-hole course. It would be a huge challenge to persuade other clubs to play matches against us on a reduced and diminished facility, namely a 9-hole course. Charities and particularly golf societies and golf break groups do not choose 9-hole courses for events or social golf days.

Any half serious golfer of which there are many thousands in the UK would not elect to play a 9-hole course over an 18-hole course. This is very clearly demonstrated by a quick review of golf break and golf day brochures where there are very few clubs offering 9-hole courses for this type of business. No golfer considers a course with 18 tees and 9 greens (each green being played twice) an 18-hole course!

There is a 9-hole (academy) course close by at Kirtlington and it is run in conjunction with their competition standard 18-hole course. The 9-hole course compliments their fine facility and provides a fun short course for members, juniors and beginners. It is a perfect combination but not a viable standalone solution for a thriving club.

Kirtlington is our nearest golf club neighbour and is known to be approaching its membership capacity and would not be able to accommodate an exodus of members from Bicester wanting competitive and leisure golf on an 18-hole course.

Other 'local' clubs have been suggested by England Golf as being within 20 minutes driving time of Bicester and therefore providing golf provision for our catchment area. The 9 clubs that have been named are Kirtlington, Buckingham, North Oxford, Tadmarton, Studley Wood, Waterstock, The Oxfordshire, Hinksey Heights and Rye Hill. As previously stated, North Oxford and Waterstock are likely to be redeveloped in the short-term. Given that we are the locals we know how the traffic affects journey times we can say quite categorically that of the others it is only Kirtlington which would fall into this category of being reachable within a 20 min journey time from Bicester. We therefore believe that the conclusion of the England Golf report that there is a high level of golf provision in the area in comparison to the demand is fundamentally flawed.

Golf is supported as a key designated sport by Cherwell District council. Golf is year on year becoming more popular. The 18-hole course at Bicester on the edge of a densely populated, and rapidly growing, built-up area will provide exercise and fitness to the local community and make a significant contribution towards the physical health and mental wellbeing of the community. The COVID pandemic has shown how important golf is to many and we have seen increased use of the facility over the summer of 2020 both from new members and pay-as-you-play.

The public footpath which runs through the golf course would be affected by the development. Currently the golfers and walkers live in harmony with the walkers benefiting from the environment created by a golf course. The footpath would have to be relocated to accommodate the development leaving the walkers to enjoy a walk around a concrete jungle.

The development will devastate a beautiful and splendid, well-regarded golf course available to golfers and the public.

In addition to the inappropriate development giving rise to the loss of a much-needed facility we are also aware of all the other negative consequences that this development will bring about. We list these below:

- Increased traffic volumes through our small villages on roads which are inadequate to cope causing pollution and traffic queues. Given the projected traffic journeys this could at times amount to gridlock in Chesterton. We would point out that when Bicester village opened, gridlock in Chesterton became a regular occurrence. This was only resolved when the road layout and slip roads on and from the A41 were rerouted.
- The enormity of the development in a village is inappropriate and not in keeping with the local area.
- The development is ecologically and environmentally ruinous.
- Severe disruption during construction for some two years or more.
- There will be no benefit to local businesses as those using the facility generally stay on site.
- Increased pollution from light and noise emissions and increased air pollution from the increase in traffic volumes.

- No social benefit to the local community, as no or limited access to the facility other than expensive day passes.
- The jobs provided by this development will not benefit the local community as unemployment is negligible. Therefore, this would require the recruitment of staff from outside the area leading to more traffic and increased pollution.

Given the original objections were overwhelming and the decision by Cherwell District Council was unanimous in its rejection of this scheme it would be appropriate to maintain the current planning decision and reject the Appeal.

Yours faithfully



Paul Brain on behalf of Bicester Golf Committees and members