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To: [Christopher Hartley](#); [Sarah Wotton](#); [Submit Appeal](#); [Chesterton Parish Council](#); [Heritage, Sophie](#)
Subject: APP/C3105/W/20/3259189
Date: 05 February 2021 11:17:13
Attachments: [further_golf_objection.pdf](#)

All

Please see attached. The Inspector has agreed to accept this submission as it may save inquiry time if parties have sight of the response now.

Kind Regards

Alison



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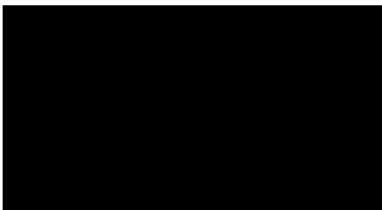
3 February 2021

Dear Sir,

**FURTHER OBJECTION FROM MEMBERS OF THE GOLF COMMITTEE AT BICESTER HOTEL
GOLF AND SPA – APP/C3105/W/20/3259189**

Further to the submission of evidence from the Appellant in respect of the above-mentioned planning appeal, the Golf committee members have prepared the attached document outlining our strong objection to the plans.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Brian (Chairman)

Golf Objection



By Committee Members of Bicester Hotel Golf and
Spa

Appeal Ref: APP/C3105/W/20/3259189

January 2021

Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Golf Committee Members of Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa (BHGS) ("*Committee Members*") in response to the Great Wolf Resorts proofs of evidence in relation to reason for refusal 1 as outlined below, which states: -

1. The proposed development by reason of its location would result in the loss of an 18-hole golf course when the Local Planning Authority's evidence indicates the course is not surplus to requirements and there is a need for more provision for golf courses in the Bicester sub-area over the plan period. The evidence and proposals for alternative sports and recreation provision included with the application is not considered sufficient to make the loss of the golf course acceptable. The development is contrary to Policy BSC10 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 which seeks to protect existing sport and recreation provision and enhance the existing provision. It is also contrary to Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Key Documents

The following key documents are referred to in this report. These have already been submitted to the Inspectorate so are not appended to this report: -

- PAW and Committee Members Golf Report – "*PAW's Golf Report*"
- CBRE's Golf Study submitted by the Appellant as part of planning application ref 19/02550/FUL – '*CBRE's Golf Study*'
- John Ashworth's Proof of Evidence – '*John Ashworth's Report*'

The following documents are appended to this report:-

- BHGS Finance Controller's Letter appended to Mr. Goddard's POE – '*FC's Letter*' – Shown at Appendix 1
- BHGS Membership Prices – Appendix 2
- Extract from BHGS' Accounts – Appendix 3

1. Golf Need

Within the Appellants documentation there appears to be little information relating to the population growth planned for the Cherwell area and particularly in Bicester. As stated in PAW's Golf Report, Bicester is expected to grow in population by c34,500 from 2017-2027 due to the planned housing growth under its Garden Town designation. It is of vital importance that facilities such as BHGS are protected to serve this growing population. This is a key argument for the retention of the existing format however the appellant has chosen to skirt over this and hasn't adequately addressed the point that there will inevitably be more demand for golf in

this location in years to come and it is important that the Bicester area safeguards current golfing provision.

Mr Ashworth has however confirmed and accepted that the North Oxford golf course will close. This is a flat, traditional 18 hole course that is within 20 miles of BHGS and is arguably the most comparable course to BHGS in the local area. On this basis, once this closes in the short term, there is a strong possibility that through the right, targeted marketing, BHGS could absorb some of its members to assist with viability of the business.

Waterstock golf course is also at threat of closure therefore reducing the level of golf courses in the local area.

2. Golf Design

From reading the documentation submitted by the Appellant it is unclear exactly what is being proposed on the remaining part of the BHGS with little detail provided. At planning application stage, the applicant was proposing a 9 hole course only on the remaining BHGS land.

From the documentation submitted by the Appellant we understand now the following is proposed;-

- The 9 hole retained course will include a two tee system offering 18 holes (via playing the 9 hole course twice)
- The driving range will be upgraded (with new covered bays to facilitate the Tracer system)
- Within the driving range, the outfield area will be dual used as a 9 hole 'Academy course'
- It is not clear whether the appellant is proposing an Adventure Golf provision

The Committee Members have comments on each of these provisions as follows:-

The 9 hole retained course will now include a two tee system

There is concern from the Committee Members with the capacity of the new format. The appellant suggests that 20,000 rounds could be played per annum – this figure is disputed, and we would expect this to be half that.

There is also concern regarding the management of the course. BHGS could have conflicting demands from members, golfbreaks customers, pay as you play customers and now Great Wolf visitors. There are already issues over holding competitions in the week currently with the 18 holes format (due to the high level of pay as you play and golfbreaks customers), so the proposed new format will only serve to exacerbate this issue. The Committee Members are concerned how this will be managed and the likelihood is the experience will be compromised for all golfers further impacting on the viability of the operation.

The 9 holes is likely to be much more intensely used and there is a concern regarding the upkeep of the course and maintaining the quality of it.

Generally, there are concerns over the course design and some key health and safety issues particularly in relation to hole number 1. Also, the design appears to move a lake on a hole, and it is not understood why this is happening and whether this is feasible.

The Driving Range

It is understood that this will be dual used with the new Academy course. Clearly the academy course will have to be used in daylight hours therefore limiting the use of the driving range. On this basis, why isn't the Appellant proposing floodlights for the range to increase the usage of the driving range? This would appear a sensible approach to safeguard the viability of this new driving range and the resultant impact of this on the local landscape would have to be considered properly through a planning application. Otherwise, it is not clear how both the driving range and Academy will be operate without each operation being compromised.

In addition, it appears that the driving range bays will be covered with enhanced facilities, but no detail of the proposed buildings are shown. The appellant is stating their intention to incorporate the new tracer technology. This would need to be put in a covered / weatherproof area to work effectively. Delivering new buildings in this location on site would require planning permission.

Recently the owners of BHGS obtained planning permission for a new activity area/assault course and outdoor swimming lake alongside a new performance gym. This was subsequently built and is now operational.

The driving range is in close proximity to new activity area and swimming lake, so can the Appellant illustrate how this will be managed safely and that the design has taken this into consideration. There appears to be significant health and safety risk to the users of the assault course and swimming lake through the risk of stray balls from the driving range or academy course. There appears to be bunds proposed between to the two areas but no netting or other boundary treatments to ensure both operations can operate safely together.

It is also not clear how the driving range will actual operate safely. When the swimming lake was opened, the current driving range was closed by BHGS and it notified that this area would be used for teaching purposes only (by the professional golfers at the club to give lesson, i.e., supervised) and only for golfers wishing to practice their short game using their own balls. (This was an answer provided by management to a question, "what is happening with the driving range "at the golf committees AGM 2020, in writing).

Finally, from a quick review (shown below) of the length of the driving range it appears to be c 275m (300 yards). With a significant number of golfers being able to hit the ball in excess of 300 yards, how is the appellant going to manage this with health and safety in mind and the interaction with Green Lane?



In summary, the proposed driving range seems rushed, reactive and not thought-through and from the evidence stated above, the proposal will:-

1. Create significant health and safety risks
2. Will compromise the viability of the driving range
3. Will compromise the viability of BHGS' existing business activity from users of the activity area and swimming lake.

The 'Academy' Course

The Appellant is Seeking to incorporate a new 9 hole course in the outfield of the new driving range. The size and usability of the course is questioned by the Golf Committee members.

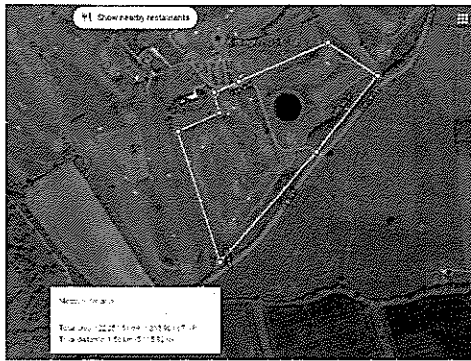
The nearest 'Academy' Course in the local area is at Kirtlington called the 'Blenheim Course'. This is proven very popular for learners of golf and several of the Committee Members did in fact learn the game playing this course. We understand that this course is however not heavily used. We have undertaken some simple analysis of the course design when compared to the Appellants proposed Academy Course.

Kirtlington's course is 9 holes, Par 30, 1,535 yards (with permanent buggy track). The shortest hole (yellow tees) is 98 yards and the longest is 240 yards offering beginners with a true variety of holes to learn the game.

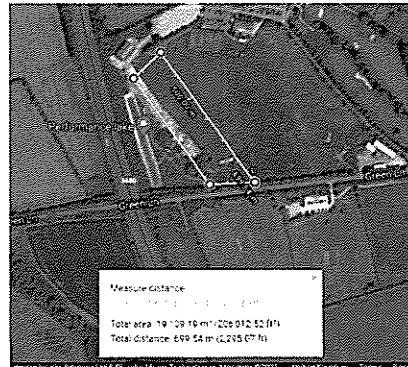
It is not clear how long the course is proposed at BHGS but from some quick analysis the hole lengths appear to c50-75 yards long and all the holes are crammed into a very small area (as shown below). This appears unusable and the design looks cramped again highlighting some clear health and safety risks.

From some simple analysis, we have measured the total area of the Kirtlington course and compared it to the area designated for the new Academy course on BHGS (as shown below).

Kirtlington



BHGS



As shown above the following areas are as follows:-

Kirtlington Academy – 122,251 sq.m

BHGS Proposed Academy – 19,139 sq.m

The proposed area designated for the Academy is c15.5% the size of Kirtlington. On this simple metric is unclear as to how usable this course would be to learner golfers when users could travel to Kirtlington for a far greater experience.

In addition, it appears the Appellant is suggesting that the driving range and the academy will be dual used. On this basis, it is not standalone, the use of it will be intermittent to the detriment of the viability of both the driving range and the academy course.

Kirtlington is open all day, every day to users of it and potential Members. It is a far superior course to the course proposed by the appellant and an annual membership costs £95p.a. The appellant is suggesting that the prospective users of the proposed Academy course will pay an annual membership of £50. The golf committee members think this is unrealistic considering the above so questions the figures included in the viability figures.

On this basis it is not clear as to how viable this is as a proposition.

Adventure Golf

It is not clear whether this is proposed or not as part of the plans.

3. Viability

Viability of existing operation

It is the Committee Members view that the Appellant has included evidence that is not robust in relation to its viability. Conveniently, the Appellant states that currently the golf element of the BHGS is unviable and that the development of Great Wolf on the back 9 holes of the course will safeguard the future of the golf element of the BHGS. This is supported by the letter from BHGS' Finance Controller which is appended to this report at Appendix 1.

Finance Controller's Letter

The letter is written in March 2020 and stresses the viability issues the BHGS has encountered over the past few years quoting a reduction in golf membership. The golf committee believe this is misleading as from their perspective BHGS has made a concerted effort to diversify its revenue streams in recent years moving away from traditional golf memberships. This is shown by the difficulty in members holding competitions as BHGS continue to hold tees back for golfbreak visitors etc. Golfbreaks visitors pay for golf, meals and hotels rooms providing additional opportunities for spin off revenue streams. A particular factor affecting memberships in late 2019 to date was/is the submission of the planning application by Great Wolf.

The FC letter paints a far gloomier picture compared to the sentiment issued in the BHGS accounts for 2019/20 (shown as an Appendix within PAW's Golf Report and below) – both would have been written at the same time (H1 2020).

Whilst it is not disputed that memberships have fallen and this has had a negative impact on business, in relation to golf activity it states in the accounts:-

"Review of Business Section it states 'Golf subscriptions have followed the national trends with a continued decrease in membership numbers but the contribution from golf operation has improved due to other revenue stream and greater efficiency"

And in the principal risk and uncertainties section it states when referring to the Covid pandemic it states

'On 23rd March the business closed its doors and it is expected that it will remain closed until July 2020, except Golf which was allowed to re-open and continues to thrive.'

On this basis it is our assertion that the Appellant and BHGS has failed to give the true picture on the viability of the existing golf operation as the FC's letter contradicts the published financial accounts. It is also fair to say that the playing of golf has seen a huge upsurge since the arrival of COVID-19 as in general the population has more leisure time due to less commuting and a recognition of the importance of an improved work/life balance and the value of outdoor exercise.

BHGS's Operation

The BHGS is true to its name in that it offers a blend of activity where each activity (golf, hotel, restaurant, spa, gym etc) work in harmony to create a viable business. These interlinkages are illustrated through the variety of different membership packages offered at BHGS – shown at Appendix 2.

On this basis, it is not clear how the appellant has calculated the income relating to golf and is likely to have given a worst case view. By dividing the number of members by their figures it equates to £681 per person pa. which looks to be well below the average typical membership fee as outlined in Appendix 2.

The information supplied by the appellant does not include the additional revenue from the following (to name a few):-

- Food and drink – assuming every member spent £10 per round for a group. Assuming 16,000 rounds (para 4.25) this would bring in £160,000 p.a
- Golfbreaks – this is a significant revenue stream for BHGS. The cost of an overnight stay is £168 (online quote for May 2021) so using the overnight stays quoted in the report of 1,359, this would add a further revenue stream of £229,000.
- Societies – golf societies are excluded but these provide a significant income stream. The 1,225 society visitors would certainly have paid for a meal and drinks. Assuming a prudent £20 per head (over and above the green fee) this would account for a further £25,000 of revenue.

In addition, there would likely be possible spin off benefits on the gym, spa and pro shop which aren't factored in. On this basis, the appellant has understated the level of revenue generated from golf activities at BHGS.

Viability of BHGS assuming development if built

One of the key themes of the John Ashworth's report is that the existing BHGS is not viable and that in fact through the delivery of the Great Wolf proposal, the BHGS would become a viable commercial enterprise and Mr Ashworth goes to great lengths to illustrate how this would happen.

Mr. Ashworth (through consultation with BHGS) in paragraph 4.39 defines what a viable revenue stream would equate too for its golf operation. This figure equates to £367,500 p.a.

Looking back at the statistics stated by My Ashworth in para 4.16 of his report, it states what golf related revenue BGHS generated over the past 5 year and an extract of the report is shown below, as follows:-

Table: Revenues from Golf at BHGS					
2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
£443,423	£424,058	£360,895	£359,928	£372,442	£315,792

This illustrates that whilst the revenue has continually reduced it flattened from 2016/17 – 2017/18 and then increased in 2018/19. There is a clear dip in 2019/20 but a few external factors would have had an impact on this, namely:-

- Great Wolf Proposal – it became public knowledge in 2019 of the Great Wolf proposals. As illustrated by Members of the Golf Committee, this had an impact on golf revenues and membership for that year.
- Covid-19 – impacted the use of the facility in early 2020 and particularly the revenue streams from golfbreaks as holiday makers were less likely to go on golf trips.

What is clear is that save for 2019/20 anomaly (justified above) the golf operation revenue is very close to achieving the £367,500 target. This is shown below for clarity in the table below (have not included the time value of money for ease):-

Year	Revenue	Target	Viable or Not	% from target
2014/15	£443,423	£367,500	£75,923	n/a
2015/16	£424,058	£367,500	56,558	n/a
2016/17	£360,895	£367,500	(£6,605)	1.7%
2017/18	£359,928	£367,500	(£7,575)	2.1%
2018/19	£372,442	£367,500	£4,942	n/a
2019/20	£315,792	£367,500	(£51,708)	n/a

Based on the above and using Mr. Ashworths own figures and excluding the anomaly year of 2019/20, the golf operation was within 1.7% and 2.1% of being viable in 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the other years were in fact viable. These figures also do not consider the other spin off revenue streams highlighted above.

In terms of the operating costs of the new facilities on BHGS if planning is approved, additional cost will be borne by BHGS on the following:-

- Additional maintenance of the 9 hole course (two tee system) – will be much more intensely used so will create additional costs
- New driving range – will require further costs to maintain along with the tracer technology
- New academy course – maintenance and general upkeep

On this basis it is the view of the Committee members that the operating costs will not differ much from the current provision.

On this basis, it would appear very drastic and disproportionate for the golf operation to be altered so significantly (i.e the development of the Great Wolf proposal, driving range, academy course, new 9 hole with two tee system) just to ensure a viable BHGS golf operation, when it has been proven that the revenue streams would only need to increase by between 1.6% and 2.1% to render the operation viable.

Mr Ashworth states that there will still be a healthy demand from members for the new format. This is highly unlikely and disputed. The overwhelming view of the current member is that most (over 75%) will not renew membership if the proposal goes ahead therefore casting significant doubt in Mr. Ashworths figures. Members already fight for tee times on competition days and days when there are major events. This already leads to complaints which would be exacerbated and will undoubtedly lead to dissatisfied members and a reduction in member numbers and the demand for golf at this location.

Regarding alternative revenue streams, visitors, golf break customers and golf societies will not select a 9-hole course with two tee system for a day out or longer golf break. Typically, golfers are seeking more of a challenge and experience of playing a course recognised as a golfing challenge, 18 holes – this is shown by the type of course marketed on golfbreaks.

Finally, Mr Ashworth fails to consider the impact of the colossal GW development on the back 9 and how this will impact the quality of setting for golf on the front 9. The backdrop of this will undoubtedly have a negative impact and will render the facility less attractive to users.

Reviewing all the above, it is clear that the appellant has incorrectly assessed the viability of the existing golf operation and failed to provide robust evidence that in fact the GW proposal will aid the viability of the BHGS.

4. Deliverability

The Golf Committee Members are concerned with the deliverability of this project. During this appeal, the appellant has changed its plans once again from the proposal at application stage with a significant level of works being required outside of the red line planning application boundary. This appears to demonstrate a reactive and rushed proposal to try and obtain planning gain.

There are no costings to support the plans which is a concern. Whilst the owners of BHGS may have some sort of arrangement with the appellant, it is not clear who is paying for the works and the specification of the works to ensure the right quality is delivered. A full planning application should be required for this.

With the inclusion of an upgraded driving range (and covered bays), new academy course, new adventure golf and revised 9 holes course with upgrades to landscaping (including moving a lake), it would appear only right that these elements would require their own planning application rather than just being added onto this appeal at a late stage.

There would likely be access alterations and material changes to the BHGS operation which need consideration and full planning application.

Due to all the detail provided in this report, we still feel this appeal should be dismissed but in the event the inspector should approve it we would expect all the works undertaken on BHGS retained land to be delivered prior to the commencement of the works on the appeal site to ensure the golfing provision on site is protected.

5. Conclusion

Following a review of the Appellant's Proof of Evidence submitted by John Ashworth Associates alongside the information already submitted by the Appellant at planning application stage (by CBRE) the following conclusions have been drawn:-

- The Appellant has failed to provide evidence that the traditional style 18 hole course is surplus to requirements
- The Appellant has failed to provide evidence that the revised course design is meeting a clear need in the area. It is also unclear exactly what the Appellant is proposing with some contradictory information provided.
- The Appellant has failed to provide robust evidence of the current viability of the BGHS and that through the development of Great Wolf's proposal the golf element of the BHGS will become viable.

- It is not clear how the plans are deliverable considering a significant proportion of the work being outside the red line planning application boundary. What about the fact that the appellant has no, as far as we are aware any rights over land outside the planning application boundary (see note from the parent company accounts below on Appendix 3)

On this basis, it is our view that the appeal should be dismissed.

Appendix 1 – FC's Letter



March 2020 – Golf Future Business Plan

It has been requested by Cherwell District Council to provide a business plan for the future of golf activity at Bicester Hotel, Golf and Spa. This is in order to explain the existing and future financial considerations relating to golf at the resort.


The number of golf members has consistently declined over recent years, from around 400 in 2010 to 170 after the recent renewals for 2020. We would expect further decline as we move forward into the new decade.

In terms of costs associated purely with golfing activity (predominantly those associated with course maintenance) these have increased from annual costs of approximately £275k in 2010 to circa £325k in the year to October 2019. Currently, golf operations at Bicester Hotel, Golf and Spa makes just a marginal profit of around £30k per year. Based on current trends, it is projected that this contribution will continue to decline until 2022 when the golf operation would go from making a marginal profit to making a marginal loss. At this point the owners would inevitably close down part or all of the golf course as the operation would no longer be sustainable. This has been discussed as part of strategic management meetings.

It is in the owner's interest to maintain some level of golf activity as it does help as part of the wider leisure offering at the hotel. As such, we have already looked at plans to close 9 of the 18 holes (irrespective of the Great Wolf planning application). To do this would inevitably result in a further drop in members, we predict by roughly 40% to around 110. However, costs would significantly reduce, to somewhere in the region of £200k, or around 60% of existing. These cost savings, coupled with increased visitor golf income (from greater availability on golf course) would provide the future golf operation at Bicester Hotel, Golf and Spa with a degree of financial stability.

In the event that Great Wolf are granted planning permission, investment to make improvements to the remaining 9 holes would be made. This would include making the 9 holes that remain into an 18 hole course (with two tee points per hole), creating a new practice range with a focus on new users, and encouraging young people to play through free access to a set number of people per year.

In terms of the implications on the business plan and figures above, this would be predicted to stem the loss of members associated with the change from the current arrangement whilst adding only a very small increase to costs if any (as the improvement works will all be secured as a single capital project and secured through a planning permission). We would also expect the broadening of access to the golf course to lead to an increase in memberships, optimistically changing the trajectory of declining membership to an increasing one. From a business plan point of view, the change in approach to golf here would create financial certainty to its continued operation.


Roger McPherson, Financial Controller, Bicester Hotel Golf and Spa

Appendix 2 – BHGS Memberships Prices

MEMBERSHIP FEES 2020-2021			
HEALTH CLUB & PERFORMANCE GYM	Annual	DD	Flexi
FULL MEMBERSHIP	£1,265.00	£119.50	£132.00
JOINT FULL MEMBERSHIP (Per Person)	£1,115.00	£103.00	£115.00
HEALTH CLUB	Annual	DD	Flexi
ADULT FITNESS	£982.00	£89.50	£99.00
JOINT FITNESS (Per Person)	£876.00	£80.50	£89.50
OFF PEAK FITNESS	£665.00	£62.00	£69.00
SPOUSE OF GOLFER FITNESS	£730.00	£67.50	£74.00
COLT FITNESS 18-21	£710.00	£65.00	£72.00
JUNIOR FITNESS 5-15	£179.00	£16.50	£18.00
JUNIOR FITNESS 16-17	£276.00	£25.00	£28.00
SWIMMING	£816.00	£74.50	£82.50
SWIMMING JOINT (Per Person)	£728.00	£67.00	£74.00
BICESTER PERFORMANCE GYM	Annual	DD	Flexi
ADULT PERFORMANCE	£970.00	£79.00	£89.00
JOINT ADULT PERFORMANCE	£790.00	£69.00	£79.00
UPGRADE	DD/Annual		
Performance gym upgrade	£30/£288		

MEMBERSHIP FEES 2020-2021			
GOLF	Annual	DD	Flexi
5 DAY GOLF	£844.00	£78.00	/
5 DAY GOLF (60+)	£759.00	£69.00	/
7 DAY GOLF	£1,199.00	£111.00	/
7 DAY GOLF JOINT (Per Person)	£1,086.00	£99.50	/
INTERMEDIATE GOLF (30-35YRS)	£849.00	£75.00	/
INTERMEDIATE GOLF (26-29YRS)	£699.00	£64.00	/
INTERMEDIATE GOLF (22-25YRS)	£598.00	£55.00	/
COLT GOLF 18-21	£327.00	£31.50	/
JUNIOR GOLF 5-17	£99.00	/	/
HEALTH CLUB & GOLF	Annual	DD	Flexi
5 DAY GOLF/FITNESS	£1,270.00	116.00	£127
7 DAY GOLF/FITNESS	£1,650.00	151.00	£166
7 DAY GOLF/FITNESS JOINT	£1,520.00	140.00	£153
JUNIOR GOLF/FITNESS 16 - 17	£326.00	30.00	£34
JUNIOR GOLF/FITNESS 5-15	£236.00	23.00	£25.00
UPGRADE	DD/Annual		
Performance gym upgrade	£30/£288		

Appendix 3 – Extract from BHGS' Accounts

Extract from Investfront (Oxon) Limited 2019 accounts – the parent company of Bicester Hotel Limited

21. EVENTS AFTER THE YEAR END

A third party has made an unsolicited approach to the company to purchase a proportion of the 'back nine' of the golf course. An option to purchase agreement has been entered into with the third party, agreeing to sell the part of the property for an agreed fee on the basis that they be successful in obtaining planning permission and that their feasibility study supports the venture. Should the third party opt not to purchase the land then they will forfeit any deposit paid.