

## **SUMMARY LANDSCAPE PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

**REDEVELOPMENT OF PART OF GOLF COURSE TO PROVIDE  
NEW LEISURE RESORT (SUI GENERIS) INCORPORATING  
WATER PARK, FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE, HOTEL,  
CONFERENCING FACILITIES AND RESTAURANTS WITH  
ASSOCIATED ACCESS, PARKING AND LANDSCAPING**

**LAND TO THE EAST OF M40 AND SOUTH OF THE A4095,  
CHESTERTON, BICESTER, OXON**

**ON BEHALF OF RULE 6 PARTY, PARISHES AGAINST WOLF (PAW)**

**SECTION 78 APPEAL OF THE TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990  
(AS AMENDED)  
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

**Prepared by: ANDREW COOK BA (Hons) MLD CMLI MIEMA CENV**

### **Pegasus Group**

Pegasus House | Querns Business Centre | Whitworth Road | Cirencester | Gloucestershire | GL7 1RT  
**T** 01285 641717 | **F** 01285 642348 | **W** [www.pegasuspg.co.uk](http://www.pegasuspg.co.uk)

Birmingham | Bracknell | Bristol | Cambridge | Cirencester | East Midlands | Leeds | Liverpool | London | Manchester

**PLANNING** | **DESIGN** | **ENVIRONMENT** | **ECONOMICS**

---

## CONTENTS:

Page No:

1.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	1
	Introduction	1
	Nature of Effect	1
	Description of the Appeal Scheme	1
	Effect on Landscape Elements	2
	Effect on Landscape Character	3
	Effects upon Visual Amenity	4
	Development in a sensitive valued landscape	5
	Size, scale and massing would cause significant urbanisation	6
	Development proposed in its location in the open countryside would cause significant urbanisation	6
	Significant urbanisation would cause unacceptable harm to the character of the area	7
	Significant urbanisation would cause unacceptable harm to the appearance of the area	7
	Harm to the rural setting of the village	7
	Harm to the amenities enjoyed by users of the public right of way	7
	Failure to reinforce local distinctiveness	8
	Summary	8

## 1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Andrew Cook and I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography (BA Hons) and a Masters Degree in Landscape Design (MLD). I am a Chartered Landscape Architect, Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), Chartered Environmentalist (C Env) and Member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (M IEMA).
- 1.2 I am instructed on behalf of Parishes Against Wolf (PAW) thereafter referred to as the Rule 6 Party or PAW to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of the appeal relating to the redevelopment of part of the Bicester Golf Course to provide a new leisure resort (sui generis) incorporating water park, family entertainment centre, hotel, conferencing facilities and restaurants with associated access, parking and landscaping.
- 1.3 My landscape proof of evidence comprises this document and a separate A4 folder, which forms my appendices. This evidence should be read in conjunction with the planning proof of evidence prepared by Steven Sensecall and the other statements submitted on behalf of PAW.

### Nature of Effect

- 1.4 I am aware that people on the whole generally adopt an adverse reaction to change, particularly with regard to their local environments, with which they are very familiar and therefore tend to adopt a rather negative stance, and adverse reaction to any change, irrespective of whether it's harmful or indeed beneficial and can be therefore emotive. However, putting that aside, it is my professional judgement that the scheme would be wholly out of keeping in terms of both character and appearance with the area, and as such I consider it would be adverse in terms of nature of effect, rather than neutral or beneficial (unless I otherwise specifically state in my proof).

### Description of the Appeal Scheme

- 1.5 The application seeks full planning consent for the redevelopment of part of a golf course to provide a new leisure resort including a water park with external slide tower, family entertainment centre, 498 room hotel, conferencing facilities and restaurants with associated access, parking and landscaping. To the north of the built complex of the development, publicly accessible open space is intended to

be provided with nature trails, play space and picnic areas. The water park and hotel proposed is the first of its kind in the UK and Europe, proposed by Great Wolf Resorts, an American company who own and operate a chain of indoor water parks in the United States and Canada.

1.6 The proposed leisure resort at Chesterton (see Officer report) includes:

- 498 bed hotel (27,250m<sup>2</sup>)
- Indoor water park (8,340m<sup>2</sup>) with external slide tower (height 22.5m)
- Family entertainment centre including an adventure park, food and beverage and merchandise retail, conferencing and back of house (12,350m<sup>2</sup>)
- The adventure park will provide activities including ropes course, climbing wall, mini golf, family bowling, arcade games and an interactive role-playing game
- Associated access and landscaping
- 902 new parking spaces
- Public parkland (6 hectares) including nature trails and play spaces

1.7 The hotel comprises 498 bedrooms typically ranging from two to six bed spaces. This along with the amount of parking proposed indicates that the number of guests on site at any one time is likely to be between 1,000 – 2,000 at peak periods. The appellant has indicated that the average length of stay for a family is 1-2 nights.

1.8 The indoor water park is an anchor of the Great Wolf Lodge. It will include a range of water park attractions, including slides, lazy rivers, toddler pools and wave machines. It is designed for use by a target audience of families with children of ages between 2 to 12 years of age. The conference centre would be supported by a small outdoor terrace overlooking west beyond which is the public nature trails area. It is clear that this proposal provides an indoor facility and does not need to rely upon a rural context in order to operate, hence the many city centre locations.

### **Effect on Landscape Elements**

1.9 In overall terms the appeal scheme would result in substantial adverse effects with regard to the overall landscape elements that currently define the landscape character of the site. The site would change from a golf course to a large-scale hotel resort complex. Many elements that currently contribute to defining the character of the site, namely trees, fairways and greens, water features would be

simply lost or significantly reduced when compared against the current profile of the site.

### **Effect on Landscape Character**

- 1.10 It is apparent from my analysis of the published Landscape Character Assessments that the environment which forms the local context for the proposed development is overwhelmingly rural in character with only limited passing references to built form and infrastructure, unlike other Landscape Character Areas. Both at the national and local level, there is recognition that whilst the majority of the landscape is defined by farmland, subdivided by fields and their boundaries defined by trees and treecover, hedges and dry-stone walls, there is much recognition that the extensive parkland landscape makes a significant contribution in defining the character and rural appearance of this particular local landscape. This site contributes to that scene and perception.
- 1.11 This is particularly evident in the vicinity of the site. Immediately to the north of lies an extensive parkland known as Bignell Park whilst a short distance to the north west of the site lies the extensive parkland of Middleton Park. Further west of this lies Rousham. Furthermore, lying south west of the site lies Kidlington Park. At its heart, the local landscape has a strong parkland feel, which is reinforced by the current golf course site with its parkland qualities.
- 1.12 With all of these local estates, their parklands have a number of common defining characteristics in that they typically reveal tree belts around their perimeters to physically and visually contain the properties from the landscape beyond, so that they are effectively visually enclosed units, whilst within the estates themselves, the landscape is almost entirely managed as grassland, whether grazed by stock or mechanically mown, but either way creates a strong sense of openness with the grassland. These sweeping meadows and lawns are invariably punctuated with groups of trees, with standard trees judiciously located to provide key internal views and vistas.
- 1.13 These defining elements are common to all these local parkland estates. Significantly, the existing golf course that falls within the appeal site has all of these key characteristics with perimeter treecover along the northern and western boundaries, with the whole site managed as grassland in the form of greens and fairways, punctuated with arrangements of treecover and shrubs to create views and vistas (to facilitate golfing in this instance). This is also the case

with other nearby golf courses such as Magnolia Park Golf and Country Club near Honeyburge. These are features that are key to defining the local landscape.

1.14 As a result, there is substantial commonality in terms of the appeal site's landscape character when compared to other extensive areas of rural land located in the countryside. The only material difference is that the estates tend to be for private use whereas the appeal site facilitates golfing for the paying public as a leisure pursuit. It is this combination of private or semi-private parks and surrounding farmland that collectively is considered to represent this quintessential English countryside that is recognised the world over as the Cotswolds. There is no doubt that the appeal site exhibits many of the key characteristics that collectively define this well known and well recognised Cotswold landscape.

1.15 In contrast, with this baseline position and existing landscape character, the proposed development with its monolithic substantial built form and extensive car park exhibits all the hallmarks of an urban environment so typical of the existing Great Wolf resorts found in the cities across the United States. Therefore, inevitably in landscape character terms, the proposed development would introduce an urban environment on the site where none exist currently, nor in the surrounding countryside and as such would be totally out of character with this rural environment. It would be more in keeping with the nearby urban area of Bicester and other nearby towns. The proposal would also have a strong urbanising influence upon the adjacent countryside in the vicinity, particularly where seen from public vantage points and residential properties. There is no doubt that this proposal would have a significant (major adverse) effect in landscape character terms.

### **Effects upon Visual Amenity**

1.16 I acknowledge that the ZTV and actual visual envelope associated with the proposed development is geographically quite limited and is a consequence of the generally treed environment of the local rural landscape, much of which is associated with the parklands and estates. However, whilst the zone of visibility is geographically limited, within this zone of visual influence the proposed development would be dominant and prominent in nearby views and as such detrimental to the local general and residential visual amenity.

1.17 Whilst there is some built form locally such as Bignell Park Barns and Bicester Golf Hotel, the scale and massing of these local buildings is modest and in the context of the treed landscape, low key in terms of their visual profile and where seen, these buildings are recessive in local views given the use of a local building stone, characteristic of the local vernacular architecture of the area. A good example of this is the adjacent Bicester Golf Hotel and Bignell Park Barns, which only generally extends to two storey in height with their vertical elements broken up and form disaggregated in terms of building footprint. Because of the very low visual profile that these buildings generate, there is a still strong sense of rurality given the absence of built form. The proposed development in contrast would as a result of being dominant and prominent in local views materially change this appearance of the character of the area reflecting the fact that this proposal would result in substantial urbanisation, totally out of keeping with the character and appearance of the area.

#### **Development in a sensitive valued landscape**

1.18 When considering these various criteria 'in the round', it is apparent that this particular parcel of land does exhibit material evidence to demonstrate that this land is a particularly valued environment that elevates it out of the ordinary everyday rural farmland landscape. After all, it is a locally cherished amenity landscape at its heart. Whilst I accept that this is not necessarily a valued landscape in the context of the Framework, paragraph 170, I would maintain that this is a highly valued landscape at the local level and this point clearly comes across in the Officer's report and representations that have been made.

1.19 A further benchmark to test value which has become common parlance is with respect to the Justice Ouseley's decision concerning valued landscapes with reference to 'demonstrable physical attributes.' In this instance, I would note that the site exhibits a combination of landscape elements that collectively resemble the local estate parklands but has the additional benefit of a public right of way passing through it, in contrast to many of the estate parklands, which remain private and inaccessible to the general public. It clearly does have demonstrable physical attributes that are recognised as defining characteristics of the local landscape and elevates it out of the everyday farmland landscape.

---

**Size, scale and massing would cause significant urbanisation**

1.20 The sheer size, scale and massing of the proposed development is substantial which is best illustrated by reference to the site wide cross sections drawing reference no: TP0103 prepared by EPR Architects. In particular, the first section in this drawing referred to as section 1-1 provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the proposed Great Wolf Lodge with the nearby Bicester Golf Hotel. Just in terms of cross-sectional analysis alone, the proposal is twice the height and three times the width and a greater magnitude in terms of volumetric calculation. (I calculate this to be in the region of a third of a million cubic metres which is massive). This is a rural landscape at its heart punctuated with a number of estate parklands with associated country houses but even these very large properties pale into insignificance in terms of size, scale and massing when compared with the Great Lodge resort built complex. This is also borne out by reference to the development footprint of the proposal in appendix 5 which shows the grain of the local landscape and just how the proposed development would be at odds in terms of size, scale and massing. As a consequence of these parameters, the proposed development would cause significant urbanisation on site and have a strong urbanising influence, due significant overdevelopment.

**Development proposed in its location in the open countryside would cause significant urbanisation**

1.21 As set out above significant urbanisation would come about as a consequence of this scheme. This perhaps might be wholly appropriate in an urban environment, such as Bicester or other nearby town, a benchmark being the landscape grain analysis, appendix 5. However, the appeal site is not in a town. Indeed, it is not even edge of town but located some distance away as an outlier from any sizeable settlements in the area and as such is located in countryside both in terms of the Development Plan and in reality. The countryside is locally defined by a range of green infrastructure, primarily comprised of farmland subdivided into fields punctuated with some estate parklands. This would form an urban outlier. As such, for the reasons articulated the development proposed would be located in open countryside yet cause significant urbanisation, both on and near site.



---

**Significant urbanisation would cause unacceptable harm to the character of the area**

- 1.22 The character of the area is documented at the national and local level being identified as the Cotswolds and locally as the Wooded Estate lands, which have been referred to as quintessential English countryside. The local landscape type provides a clue in the name as to what is present locally, i.e., a relatively wooded landscape but with parkland estates. The golf course in terms of its landscape character when considered in its totality has significant commonality with these parklands which collectively reflect and are the key characteristics that define the local landscape.

**Significant urbanisation would cause unacceptable harm to the appearance of the area**

- 1.23 This characterisation informs the appearance of the area. Whilst there is some built form locally, it is relatively modest and recessive in nature and adopts a low visual profile (e.g., golf hotel) and as such the appearance of the landscape remains overwhelmingly rural in character. Such significant urbanisation of the site would be unacceptably harmful to the appearance of the area.

**Harm to the rural setting of the village**

- 1.24 The village of Chesterton lies a short distance to the east of the appeal site. Despite Bicester's recent growth, the village retains a strong rural context in both physical and visual terms. Development on the site as proposed would introduce significant urbanisation of the site and exert strong urbanising influences upon the adjacent landscape which in itself contributes to the rural setting of Chesterton. The scheme in such close proximity would, as a result, harm the rural setting of this village, in terms of its landscape context.

**Harm to the amenities enjoyed by users of the public right of way**

- 1.25 A public right of way currently runs through the site and benefits from the golf course's visual amenity that provides an attractive context to the route. For the length of footpath within the site itself, this amenity would be totally lost as a consequence of the development. With the development in place, users of this route would have to take the diverted route passed and alongside the monolithic building complex, walk alongside the internal roads and car park with associated traffic movement to exit the site and come onto the Kirtlington Road. At which point, pedestrians would have to walk on a roadside pavement until re-joining the

unaffected route further west. Such change in the viewing experience for users of this route would be significantly adverse and materially harmful.

### **Failure to reinforce local distinctiveness**

- 1.26 Analysis of the American resorts clearly reveals the standard approach to the building complex and resort design which has been lifted and placed on the site with no genuine regard to the site-specific circumstances pertaining to the site's landscape context. This scheme neither respects, conserves nor enhances the local distinctiveness of the site and its rural context as explained in my proof. The scheme also fails to reinforce the local distinctiveness of the area. In simple terms, whilst I understand the nature of the scheme proposed, it is simply the wrong development in the wrong place.

### **Summary**

- 1.27 For the reasons outlined above and articulated in my landscape proof of evidence, I consider that the appeal scheme would conflict with the NPPF and Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan (2011 – 2031) Part 1, saved policies C8 and C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996. As such, there are substantive reasons for refusing planning permission from a landscape perspective and I respectfully request that the Inspector dismisses this appeal as far as landscape and visual matters are concerned.