

Application No.: 19/02550/F
Applicant's Name: Great Lakes UK Ltd
Proposal: 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.
Location: Land to the east of M40 and south of A4095, Chesterton, Bicester, Oxon

Economic Growth Comments

Summary

In economic development terms, the proposed development would bring a range of benefits to the district whilst also presenting some challenges to be overcome.

- a) A major benefit would be the significant investment in a new resort that would create economic value for years to come but the resultant impact upon the environment and communities could be harmful unless significant and effective mitigation is put in place.
- b) Great Wolf Lodges are known in North America for offering 'everything under one roof' – in effect, a Great Wolf Lodge is a destination resort and as such the spin-off economic benefits to the wider economy may be limited.
- c) The leisure facilities created by the development would be available to people from throughout the region, including local families, but it is unclear how the proposal contributes to the Garden Town principles of Bicester at this location.
- d) The proposal suggests the creation of hundreds of jobs, some of which will be in professional and managerial roles, but the majority would be in lower skilled occupations that do not reflect the desired direction suggested in either the Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy or the emerging Cherwell Industrial Strategy.
- e) Furthermore, there is an issue relating to supply of labour – the latest figures suggest that for those aged between 16-64, 12,700 are inactive and 9,300 do 'not want a job' (ONS annual population survey, Oct 2018-Sept 2019). 3,400 people living in the district may therefore be expected to be seeking work but the proposal does not indicate how skill-sets or ambitions will match.
- f) The applicant is making preparations to recruit apprentices and this is to be welcomed along with the suggested career paths but it is doubted if sufficient numbers could be recruited at this location.
- g) For people seeking leisure and hospitality roles, it would provide tremendous opportunities but the salaries of the staff are not indicated and it is unclear if they would contribute to reducing 'the affordability gap' in local housing.

Overall, the principle of this development proposal is to be welcomed as part of a broad range of inward investment to provide opportunities for local employment and leisure facilities for an expanding number of households in the town, district and wider region. However, the selected location has serious practical issues to overcome which may affect the operation of the resort and impact detrimentally upon local communities as suggested in its current form.

If the proposal at this location is approved, I would wish to help to mitigate those issues within my remit – including potential s106 activity to be included within the emerging Cherwell Industrial Strategy's delivery plan. Equally, if this proposal is refused, I remain very open to working with the applicant to identify an alternative location within the district.

Steven Newman
Senior Economic Growth Officer
Place and Growth Directorate
Cherwell District Council