

Report to **Planning Committee**
Date **21 January 2020**
By **Director of Planning**
Local Authority **Horsham District Council**
Application Number **SDNP/18/05914/FUL**
Applicant **Mr Alistair Adams**
Application **Change of use of the land for the extension to existing golf course for 6 hole practice short course**
Address **West Sussex Golf Club
Golf Club Lane
Wiggonholt
RH20 2EN**

Recommendation: That the application be permitted for the reasons set out in paragraph 5 of this report.

The purpose of this report is to update Members following the resolution to defer the application at the meeting on 18 June 2019. This report should be read in conjunction with the report to the 18 June 2019 Committee, which is appended.

I Introduction

- 1.1 The planning application reference SDNP/18/05914/FUL for the change of use of the land to provide a 6-hole practice short course extension to the existing golf club, was presented to Planning Committee South on 18 June 2019. At this meeting, it was resolved that the application be deferred to allow for:
- (a) Further consideration of the impact of the proposal on the neighbouring equestrian use
 - (b) Further consideration of the impact of the proposal on the Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) [also known as the Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation]
- 1.2 The Authority's Agricultural Consultant was consulted on the application to provide comments on the impact the proposed use would have on the nearby equestrian facility, particularly in regard to noise. The Ecology Consultant has also been consulted to provide comment on the impact on habitats and biodiversity within the Arun Valley SAC.
- 1.2 The Applicant submitted a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Corylus Ecology dated November 2019. The Survey includes a Phase I Habitat Survey which provides information relating to the habitats within the site, and a Protected Species Assessment which identified potential for protected species.

2 Planning Policy

- 2.1 Following deferral at Planning South Committee, the South Downs Local Plan has now been formally adopted by the South Downs National Park Authority. The local planning policy context has therefore been updated, with the Core Strategy (2007) and Horsham District General Development Control Policies (2007) now superseded by the South Downs Local Plan.
- 2.2 The relevant planning policies within the South Downs Local Plan are as follows:

- Core Policy SD1: Sustainable Development
- Core Policy SD2: Ecosystem Services
- Strategic Policy SD4: Landscape Character
- Strategic Policy SD5: Design
- Strategic Policy SD8: Dark Night Skies
- Development Management Policy SD11: Trees, Woodland, and Hedgerows
- Development Management Policy SD22: Parking Provision
- Strategic Policy SD23: Sustainable Tourism
- Development Management Policy SD43: New and Existing Community Facilities
- Development Management Policy: Provision and Protection of Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities, and Burial Grounds/Cemeteries

2.3 The draft Local Plan policies were considered when assessing the application. However, as the South Downs Local Plan is the most up to date development plan, the development must accord with the relevant planning policies within the plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. An updated assessment of the considerations are summarised below.

Principle of Development

2.4 Policy SD23 of the South Downs Local Plan relates to sustainable tourism, and states that development proposals for recreation facilities will be permitted where it is demonstrated that: the proposals will provide opportunities for visitors to increase their awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities; the design and location of development minimises the need for travel by private car and encourages access and/or subsequent travel by sustainable means; development proposals will not detract from the experience of visitors or adversely affect the character, historical significance, appearance, or amenity of the area; and where proposals are located outside settlement policy boundaries, they positively contribute to the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park, and are closely associated with other attractions/established tourism uses, including public rights of way network.

2.5 The application relates to the change of use of a triangular area of land to the south of the site to be used for a 6-hole practice green. The proposal would involve the laying out of a small practice green to accommodate younger and beginner club members.

2.6 Such a proposal would increase and improve the recreational facilities offered at the West Sussex Golf Club and is considered to further promote recreational use and economic growth within the countryside. The proposal is therefore considered to contribute to the sustainable development of the rural area. As such, the proposal is considered acceptable in principle, subject to all other material considerations.

Landscape Impact

2.7 Policy SD4 of the South Downs Local Plan states that development proposals will only be permitted where they conserve and enhance landscape character, reflecting the context and type of landscape in which the proposal is located; and the design, layout and scale of proposals conserve and enhance existing landscape character features.

2.8 The proposal would involve minor landscaping works to facilitate the change of use, with the laying of 6no. tees and holes positioned around the perimeter of the plot, along with the provision of trees to the southern tip of the site and along the southern boundary. It is also proposed to lay an area of heather and wild flowers centrally within the site, reflecting the landscaping of the wider golf course.

2.9 The proposed landscaping is considered to be reflective of the wider golf course, utilising planting that would integrate the practice short course within the context of the wider surroundings. It is therefore considered that the proposal would retain the countryside landscape and character of the area, in accordance with Policy SD4 of the South Downs Local Plan.

Amenity Impact

- 2.10 Policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan states that development proposals will be permitted whether they sensitive and have regard to avoiding harmful impacts upon, or from, any surrounding uses and amenities.
- 2.11 The impact of the proposal on the nearby equestrian use will be discussed in further detail below. Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that the proposed use would introduce additional activity into the formerly underused piece of land, with the associated movements from groups of golfers and the associated noise involved with general activity. It is however considered that such activity would be commensurate to the existing activity on the established golf course. It is not therefore considered that the proposal would result in harm to the amenities or sensitivities, in accordance with Policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan.

Highways Impact

- 2.12 Policy SD22 of the South Downs Local Plan states that development proposals will be permitted if they provide an appropriate level of private cycle and vehicle parking to serve the needs of that development in accordance with the relevant adopted parking standards for the locality. All new private and public parking provision will: be of a location, scale and design that reflects its context; and incorporate appropriate sustainable drainage systems.
- 2.13 The application site benefits from an existing and established access, with an area of hardstanding utilised as car park. The size and number of parking spaces are considered sufficient to accommodate both the existing and proposed use, with the existing access considered to be functioning appropriately.
- 2.14 No objections are therefore raised on highways grounds, and it is considered that the proposal would accord with policy SD22 of the South Downs Local Plan.

3 Consultation Responses

- 3.1 **Reading Agricultural Consultant:** The proposal is an extension to an outdoor sports and recreational facility at West Sussex Golf Club, and it is accepted that this will introduce additional activity at the application site. The area of land subject of the application has previously been routinely maintained with mowing.

The Applicant's Noise Impact Statement accepts that small numbers of golfers, in groups of 2 or 4 will be playing in the proposed area, and that there will be sound of golf shots being hit. It also notes that there are already golf holes on the main golf course which have been heard for decades. It notes that the golf course itself is surrounded by a screen of pine and birch trees which afford both acoustic and visual cover.

It is accepted that trees and hedges offer a positive effect in minimising noise. The additional landscaping, in the form of tree planting and hedges, will greatly assist in minimising noise and maintaining the amenity of the neighbouring property. The Applicant has provided detailed mitigation and management proposals for club members through signage and behavioural etiquette to ensure that those areas closest to the bridleway are used appropriately by those using the 6-hole golf course. The distance from the bridleway and the proposed landscaping is considered acceptable.

The impact of noise on horses is addressed in the British Horse Society (BHS) document, and while it is accepted that there are variations in horse temperament, the nature of the environment, and the confidence/ability of the horse rider, it clearly accepts that horses become accustomed to noise whether short sharp sounds, continuous noise, or discontinuous noise, and any impact of noise on a horse can be reduced by acoustic barriers such as vegetation.

It is considered that the noise of a golf club hitting a golf ball is a very short discontinuous noise, and with the mitigation measures proposed, in the form of additional tree and hedge planting, it will reduce the impact of noise on horses in the vicinity of the application site as recommended and noted in the BHS document. Overall it is considered that the mitigation measures contained

within the Applicant's proposal will significantly reduce the impact of any noise and disturbance on the equestrian unit and users of the Public Right of Way/Bridleway.

3.2 **Ecology Consultant:** Recommend Approval subject to attached conditions

Following review of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Corylus Ecology dated November 2019, the information is sufficient to provide certainty to the Local Planning Authority of likely impacts from the development, and that any necessary mitigation will be effective.

Impacts will be minimised such that the proposal is acceptable subject to conditions. In terms of measurable net gain for biodiversity, the enhancements proposed will contribute to this aim.

3.3 **Natural England:** Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have likely significant effects on the Arun Valley SPA, and has no objection to the proposed development.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Corylus Ecology dated November 2019 identifies that the existing habitat, present within the application boundary, is not functionally linked to the Arun Valley SPA. In addition, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not damage or destroy the interest features of Amberley Wild Brooks, Pulborough Brooks, Waltham Brooks, Hurston Warren and Parham Park Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

4 Planning Assessments

Impact on neighbouring equestrian use

- 4.1 The application site is located to north and east of Hurston Place Farm Stables that provides equestrian facilities including a sand school. The land subject of the application wraps around the sand school and paddocks of this neighbouring use, with the site boundary currently defined by post and rail fencing and hedging.
- 4.2 The Council's Agricultural Consultant has provided comment in regard to the proposed extension of the golf club, and the potential impact this would have on the nearby equestrian use, particularly in regard to noise.
- 4.3 The impact on horses is addressed in the British Horse Society document "The Impact of Noise on Horses", and this refers to the ways in which certain noises can trouble a horse and have a greater impact on behaviour. However, it also accepts that horses can become accustomed to noise whether through short sharp sounds, continuous noise, or discontinuous noise (gunshot, motorway, railway train) and that any impact of noise on a horse can be reduced by acoustic barriers such as vegetation.
- 4.4 The Agricultural Consultant considers that the noise of a golf club hitting a golf ball is a very short discontinuous noise, with the mitigation measures proposed (in the form of additional tree and hedge planting) considered to reduce the impact of noise on horses in the vicinity. It is therefore considered that these mitigation measures will significantly reduce the impact of any noise and disturbance on the nearby equestrian use and users of the Public Right of Way.
- 4.5 On the basis of the response of the Agricultural Consultant, it is considered that that the proposed use would not result in harm to the amenities or sensitivities of neighbouring properties, in accordance with SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan.

Impact on the Arun Valley Special Protected Area

- 4.6 The Applicant has submitted a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Corylus Ecology dated November 2019. The Report identifies the ecological interest of the site and in the surrounding area, including the Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation some 1.5km west of the site. The Report concludes that the site contains limited habitat for protected species, with the majority of the site comprising well managed grass. The site is relatively well sheltered due to the scattered mature trees and woodlands that are visible from the site. Moreover, the settlement of West

Chiltington lies immediately to the east of the golf course, beyond which there is a mosaic of hedge-lined fields and scattered woodlands.

- 4.7 Areas of unmanaged grassland and tall ruderal are suitable for commuting and foraging amphibians and reptiles, however there are no opportunities for hibernation. The Report states that no further surveys for reptiles, amphibians, dormice or badgers are required.
- 4.8 In addition, the site offers limited value for wintering birds, and no further surveys are required. The Report outlines that the site is largely sub-optimal habitat for Bewick's swan, and therefore there is only a very limited chance that swans would use the site. The site does not therefore comprise prime foraging habitat for this species, and given the site's location, the habitats it supports, and the surrounding landscape, it is considered that the site does not comprise 'functional habitat' that may be used by Bewick's swan. Any change in land use would not therefore constitute a loss of habitat for this species.
- 4.9 Ecological enhancements have been proposed including log piles along the banks of the reservoir to provide suitable hibernacula for amphibians, planting of marginal and floating plants within the reservoir to provide amphibian cover from predation, planting of nectar-rich species, and the installation of bird, bat and insect boxes.
- 4.10 Natural England have raised no objection to the proposed development, and consider that the proposal will not have likely significant effects on the Arun Valley SPA. In addition, based on the information submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not damage or destroy the interest features of Amberley Wild Brooks, Pulborough Brooks, Waltham Brooks, Hurston Warren and Parham Park Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Following consultation with the Ecology Consultant, it is considered that sufficient information has been provided to provide certainty of the likely impacts from the development and that any necessary mitigation will be effective. It is not therefore considered that the proposed development would result in harm to the Arun Valley SAC.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The resolution of Committee raised concerns in respect of the impact the proposed development would have on the neighbouring equestrian use and the Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation.
- 5.2 The Council's Agricultural Consultant and Ecology Consultant have been consulted on the application, and have provided comments in regard to noise impact on the nearby equestrian use and the habitats and biodiversity within the site and Arun Valley SAC. No objections have been raised by these consultees, and the development is not considered to result in harm to the amenities of the nearby equestrian use or the ecological interest of the site and nearby Arun Valley SAC.
- 5.3 The proposed development is therefore considered acceptable in principle and is not considered to result in harm to the landscape character of the area, its ecological interest, and the amenities of neighbouring properties. The proposal is therefore considered to accord with relevant national planning policies and the policies within the South Downs Local Plan. The Officer recommendation is therefore to approve planning permission subject to the conditions listed below.

6 Reason for Recommendation and Conditions

It is recommended that the application be approved for the reasons set out below.

1. **Approved Plans List**
2. **Time Condition:** The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3. **Pre-Occupation Condition:** Prior to the first use of the development hereby permitted, full details of all hard and soft landscaping works, including the planting of trees along the southern and western boundaries of the site, shall have been submitted to and approved, in writing, by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include plans and measures addressing the following:

- Details of all existing trees and planting to be retained;
- Details of all proposed trees and planting, including schedules specifying species and plant numbers.

The approved landscaping scheme shall be fully implemented in accordance with the approved details within the first planting season following the first occupation of any part of the development. Unless otherwise agreed as part of the approved landscaping, no trees or hedges on the site shall be wilfully damaged or uprooted, felled/removed, topped or lopped without the previous written consent of the Local Planning Authority until 5 years after completion of the development. Any proposed planting, which within a period of 5 years, dies, is removed, or becomes seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory development that is sympathetic to the landscape and townscape character and built form of the surroundings, and in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan.

4. **Regulatory Condition:** The development hereby permitted shall be undertaken in strict accordance with the ecological mitigation and enhancement measures set out in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report reference 19145 dated November 2019.

Reason: To conserve and enhance Protected and Priority species and allow the LPA to discharge its duties under the UK Habitats Regulations, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended and s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (Priority habitats & species).

5. **Regulatory Condition:** No external lighting or floodlighting shall be installed other than with the permission of the Local Planning Authority by way of formal application.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of the locality and in accordance with policies SD5 and SD8 of the South Downs Local Plan.

6. **Regulatory Condition:** No amplified music or amplified speech shall be played/delivered at any time.

Reason: To safeguard the amenities of neighbouring properties in accordance with policy SD5 of the South Downs Local Plan.

11. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 11.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

12. Human Rights Implications

- 12.1 This planning application has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

13. Equality Act 2010

- 13.1 Due regard has been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010.

14. Proactive Working

Statement pursuant to Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received, in order to be able to, where possible, grant permission.

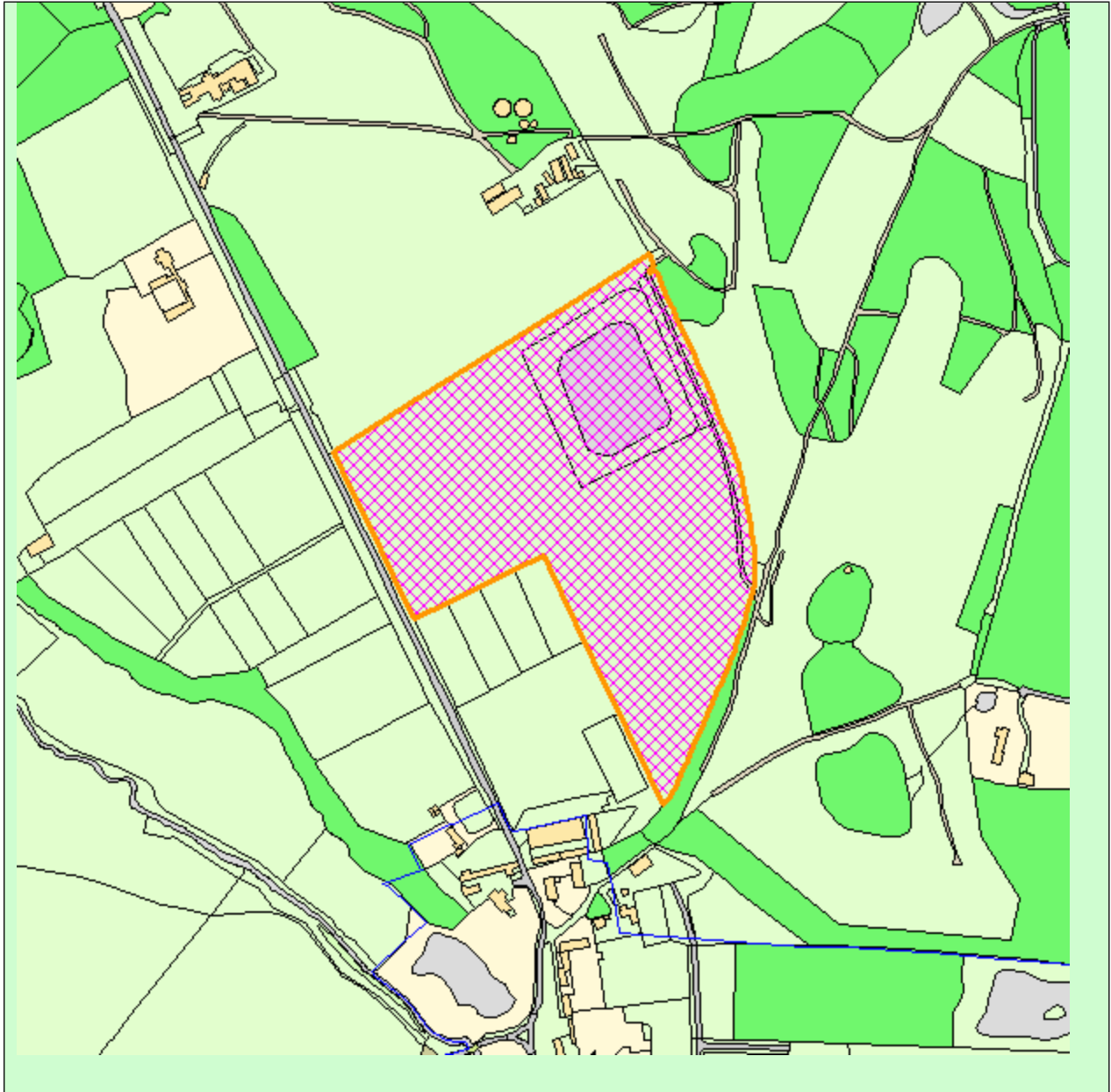
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Appendices
Appendix 1 - Site Location Map
Appendix 2 – Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application

Appendix I

Site Location Map



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Appendix 2 – Plans Referred to in Consideration of this Application

The application has been assessed and recommendation is made on the basis of the following plans and documents submitted:

Plan Type	Reference	Version	Date on Plan	Status
Plans - Location	NONE		19.11.2018	Approved
Plans - Short course	NONE		19.11.2018	Approved
Reports - Design and Access Statement	NONE		19.11.2018	Approved
Reports - Noise Impact Statement	NONE		19.11.2018	Approved
Miscellaneous - Photo	X 2		19.11.2018	Approved

Reasons: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.