

Application No: 20/2925M

Location: ADLINGTON GOLF CENTRE, LONDON ROAD, ADLINGTON,  
SK10 4NG

Proposal: Construction of an Adventure Golf Course with associated works

Applicant: Adlington Golf Centre Ltd

Expiry Date: 20-Nov-2020

## **SUMMARY**

The site lies within the North Cheshire Green Belt. National and local policy affords significant protection to the Green Belt. Whilst the existing use of the land is as a golf course, and the proposal for an Adventure Golf Facility would fall within the same use, the proposal would involve the provision of a substantial number of structures and significant engineering operations to re-profile the land. Whilst the provision of buildings (which would also include the themed structures) could be considered as 'appropriate facilities' for outdoor sport and recreation as well as the associated engineering operations, this is subject to their impact on openness.

Taken as a whole, the various structures, features and associated means of enclosure would have a material impact on openness and cause encroachment into the countryside thereby undermining the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. By reason of the harm to openness, the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The benefits of the proposal in terms of promoting the health and wellbeing of users and the positive impact on the local economy including tourism are not enough to outweigh the significant harm to the Green. The proposal is therefore contrary to the advice of the NPPF and Development Plan Policies PG 3 of the CELPS and saved GC1 of the MBLP.

There would also be harm to the landscape, which in this case, carries significant weight against the proposal. The proposed development is more akin to a theme park than part of a golf course and so along with the lack of detail; it is considered that the proposals are contrary to policies SE 1 and SE 4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

The site lies within the Manchester Airport Safeguarding Zone. Insufficient information has been submitted with the application to determine the likely threat to aircraft from birdstrike, which is a material consideration. Approval of the scheme contrary to the advice of the Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport would be contrary to the advice the Town and Country Planning (safeguarded aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas) Direction 2002.

Comments from the Council's Arboricultural Officer are awaited and will be reported to members by way of an update.

There are no objections on the grounds of residential amenity, ecology, highways, public rights of way, flood risk or heritage assets. However, these considerations do not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, landscape impact and impact on airport safeguarding and so the application is recommend accordingly.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**REFUSE**

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

This application relates to land associated with Adlington Golf Centre, which is located to the south west of Adlington Business Park in Poynton. Adlington Golf Centre currently comprises of a driving range, academy course, a pitch and putt course and a graduate course with a clubhouse building and car park. This application relates specifically to the original 9 hole graduate golf course situated to the north east of the existing golf centre. The site measures approximately 4.5 ha in size. The land sits directly to the west of the proposed Poynton Relief Road which would run on a north to south alignment. The site remains fairly open with some variance in levels across the site. Adlington Bridleway No.42 runs along the northern and western boundaries to the site providing access to Shirdfold Farm which is located approximately 70 metres to the north. The site lies within the North Cheshire Green Belt and Manchester Airport's Safeguarding Area.

## **PROPOSAL**

Full planning permission is sought to construct an Adventure Golf Course with associated works in place of the original 9 hole graduate course, which has been replaced by a newly opened 9 hole graduate course located to the south of the golf centre. The original graduate course had to be replaced as a result of the proposed Poynton Relief Road as it severed the course. The applicant is seeking to re-purpose the remaining land to the west of the proposed road with an 18 hole Adventure Golf Course based on Australian themes as well as a service hut of approximately 10 metres x 5 metres, with ground engineering works.

## **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

00/1519P – EXTENSION AND IMPROVEMENTS OF EXISTING DRIVING RANGE FACILITIES, NEW CAR PARKING PROVISION AND NEW 9-HOLE GOLF COURSE AND ACCESS – Approved 05-Oct-2000

01/1640P - CONSTRUCTION OF NEW ACCESS ROAD (TO SERVE ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT WITHIN STOCKPORT BOROUGH), SECURITY LODGE AND LANDSCAPING – Approved 01-Oct-2004

## **POLICIES**

### **Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – 2010-2030**

PG3 – Green Belt  
SD1 - Sustainable Development in Cheshire East  
SD2 - Sustainable Development Principles  
IN 1 - Infrastructure  
SE 1 - Design  
SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity  
SE 4 - The Landscape  
SE 5 - Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland  
SE 7 – Heritage Assets  
SE 13 - Flood Risk and Water Management  
SC 1 – Leisure and Recreation  
EG 2 - Rural Economy

CO2 – Enabling Business Growth Through Transport Infrastructure

**Macclesfield Local Plan (Saved policies)**

BE.1 – Amenity  
BE.3 – Access and Parking  
BE.4 – Drainage, Utilities and Resources  
NE.5 – Nature Conservation and Habitats  
NE.9 – Protected Species  
NE.17 – Pollution Control  
NE.20 – Flood Prevention  
GC1 – Green Belt

**Adlington Neighbourhood Plan (Stage 7 – Neighbourhood Area Designation)** Adlington has been designated as a 'Neighbourhood Area', which is a very early stage in the Neighbourhood Planning process and can be afforded limited weight at this stage.

**Other Material Considerations**

The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF)  
The EC Habitats Directive 1992  
Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010  
Circular 6/2005 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System  
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

**CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Environmental Protection** – No objection subject to informatives relating to construction hours and contaminated land

**Flood Risk Manager** – No objection subject to a condition that the development is carried out in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA)

**Highways** – No objection

**Manchester Airport (MAN)** – Object on the grounds of flight safety. The proposed lake as the potential to increase birdstrike risk to aircraft.

**Public Rights of Way (PROW)** – No objection - Although the proposed development appears to be adjacent to a Public Right of Way, namely Bridleway No.42 in the parish of Adlington, it is unlikely the development will impact on the adjacent PROW it is recommended that an advice note be attached to any approval reminding the developer of their obligations.

**Sport England** – Do not wish to comment

**VIEWS OF ADLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

No comments received.

## **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

One representation has been received from the neighbouring Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council offering no objection to the proposals.

## **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **Principle of Development**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) affords the Green Belt significant protection stating at para 144:

*“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”*

NPPF Para 145 states that a Local Planning Authority should regard the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt as inappropriate development unless it meets with one of the exceptions listed. One such exception is:

*“b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;”*

NPPF Para 146 (b) states that, amongst other things, other certain forms of development including ‘engineering operations’ are not inappropriate development provided they also preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Policy PG 3 of the CELPS and saved Policy GC1 of the MBLP similarly afford significant protection to the Green Belt and resist inappropriate development. Both policies permit proposals for outdoor sport and recreation where they preserve openness. However, saved Policy GC1 is more restrictive than the NPPF and CELPS PG 3 in that excepted buildings will only be permitted where they are ‘essential’.

The proposal does not involve a change in the use of the land as it would remain in use as a golf course. However, the proposal does seek permission for some significant engineering operations including a re-profiling of the land to facilitate its use as a ‘themed’ Adventure Golf Facility. Added to this, there would be a substantial number of structures erected to accompany the theme of each hole, some of which would be sizeable. It is indicated that these would be centred around an Australian theme, so for example, the course would feature scale versions of Ayers Rock and the Sydney Opera House.

The provision of buildings (which would also include the themed structures) could be considered as ‘appropriate facilities’ for outdoor sport and recreation. However, this is subject to their impact on openness. The engineering operations are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt either, again, subject to the impact on openness.

The proposal would include the construction of a single storey 'service hut' building, which would serve as the point of sales area with a small office for administration purposes. Whilst this building is shown on the submitted plans, it is only shown indicatively albeit it would have a footprint of approximately 10 metres by 5 metres. There are no detailed drawings of it, for example elevations or floorplans. Thus, whilst the supporting information describes the service hut as a modest sized building, without the benefit of such detail, it is difficult to accurately assess the impact on openness.

With regard to the layout of the site, again, this is only really shown indicatively with 'sketch proposals'. However, it does show that the facility would typically include pathways, greens and the various proposed themed structures on and in between the holes. It would also include varying boundary treatments, again to accommodate the theme of the facility. The structures would be of varying height, size and scale.

The largest structure would be a scale model of Ayers Rock on hole 15. Again, the plans are not detailed and just show a sketch drawing. However, this indicates that it would measure some 24 metres in length with an overall height of nearly 6 metres. On hole 16, there would be a water tower to mimic a gold mine. This structure would have a height of approximately 4 metres in height. However, the scale shown on the drawings is inaccurate. Other notable structures include a bridge on hole 5, which would measure approximately 16 metres in length, 2 metres wide and would have a height of approximately 3 metres and hole 4 which would have a replica of Sydney Opera House structure measuring approximately 3.7 metres in height. There would be various other themed structures of a smaller size ranging from a 'Ute', kangaroo, 'dunny' and boomerangs.

In terms of their impact on openness, this needs to be considered in the context of the proposed land levels, as the engineering operations would comprise of a cut and fill exercise in order to create a central lake feature and to re-profile the land to create the 18 holes. This would in part reduce the overall height of some of the structures relative to the existing ground levels. However, taken as a whole, the various structures, features and associated means of enclosure would have a material impact on openness and cause encroachment into the countryside thereby undermining the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. By reason of the harm to openness, the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

For this scheme to be granted planning permission, the identified harm to the Green Belt (and any other harm, which will be explored further) must be *clearly outweighed* by other considerations and whether there are any 'very special circumstances' which exist to outweigh the identified harm.

The applicant has not put a case forward for very special circumstances, but has noted the benefits such proposal would have on the health and wellbeing of users and the positive impact on the local economy including tourism. It is acknowledged that the proposal would provide additional recreational facilities which would assist the health and wellbeing of the community as well as the local economy. However, the weight of these other considerations is not enough to outweigh the significant harm to the Green already identified contrary to the advice of the NPPF and Development Plan Policies PG 3 of the CELPS and saved GC1 of the MBLP.

## **Landscape Impact**

The application has been supported by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). The LVA identifies that the site lies within 'agricultural and wooded areas' and that the site itself comprises intensively managed amenity grassland and scattered trees, very much how one would expect a golf course to

appear in the landscape. The LVA identifies that an industrial estate lies to the north, actually the east and that to the north and north west is the former Woodford Aerodrome, now being partly developed as Woodford Garden Village.

The LVA identifies the National Character in which the application site lies which is the 'NCA 61, Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plains, as well as that in the Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment LCT 11: Higher Wooded Farmland and specifically LCA 11a- Adlington'. The appraisal also identifies that the application site is located within the boundary of the Cheshire East Green Belt – Policy PG 3.

The Council's Principal Landscape Architect has reviewed the LVA and assessed the proposal in terms of their landscape impacts. The LVA makes an assumption that the proposed adventure golf course will not be incongruous. However, this is something that the Council's Principal Landscape Architect disagrees with and is not appropriately reflected in the LVA. The proposed development will involve extensive earth modelling over a relatively large area, illustrated on the Cut and Fill Drawing, which shows that the most elevated parts of the surrounding arc will be in excess of 7 metres above the central part of the adventure course. While this would indeed mean that parts of the proposed development may be below the existing ground levels, it results in a large and extensively remodelled landscape that would appear incongruous in the surrounding landscape character area and is not a feature that is representative of golf courses generally or even the Higher Wooded Farmland Landscape type.

Added to earth remodelling, the separate items to be installed include Pinnacles, 12 quarry rock pieces set into the ground, no dimensions are given for the boulders or type of rock; Wave Rock, little detail is given to explain what this is or its final appearance; Cattle, which includes a model of a cowboy on a horse and a herd of cattle painted onto plywood – dimensions not given; a model of the Sydney Opera House – reinforced concrete; Sydney Harbour Bridge; Spiders and Bats – built into a room in what appears to be a substantial area; Ayers Rock, which appears to be approximately 18 metres in length and in excess of 5 metres in height, as well as a number of other items relating to Australia and a waterbody. While these sketches are illustrative they do not provide accurate dimensions or details of construction and final appearance. Likewise, the proposed Landscape Plan offers very little information on what landscape planting is actually proposed and so no accurate assessment can be made with regards to the appropriateness or details, numbers or species.

All the proposed structures are based on Australian themes and as the LVA states the Australian theme may make it (the Adventure Golf Course) incongruous in the Cheshire Countryside. This must be considered in light of the existing golf course, described in the LVA as a Graduate Course, which is amenity grass and scattered trees.

CELPS Policy SE 4 – Landscape of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy indicates that all development should conserve the landscape character and also seek to enhance the historic, natural and man made landscapes that contribute to local distinctiveness. Developments should incorporate landscaping that reflects the local character. Particular attention should be paid to design and landscape character so the appearance and distinctiveness of the countryside is preserved and enhanced. Policy SE1 – Design requires development to make a positive contribution to their surroundings and Policy PG 3 seeks to protect the openness of the Green Belt and countryside.

In its current form, the Council's Principal Landscape Architect considers the proposed development to be incongruous. While the immediate surrounding landscape is a golf course and agricultural land, the

proposed development is more akin to a theme park than part of a golf course and so along with the lack of detail; it is considered that the proposals are contrary to policies SE 1 and SE 4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

## **Trees**

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA). It identifies 5 trees for removal to accommodate the proposed adventure golf course. The AIA concludes that these tree losses could be appropriately mitigated for with replacement planting as part of a landscape strategy. It also concludes that retained trees would be able to be protected with suitable measures. This is currently being reviewed by the council's Arboricultural and Forestry Section and their comments will be reported to members by way of an update.

## **Ecology**

The Council's Nature Conservation Officer (NCO) has reviewed the application with regard to the following species:

Great Crested Newts - This protected species is known to occur at a number of ponds in this broad locality. The application site however offers very limited habitat for great crested newts and the proposals would not result in the fragmentation or isolation of great crested newt habitat. Considering the scale and nature of the proposed development and its distance from the nearest ponds, the potential impacts of the proposed development are limited to a low risk of any newts that venture onto the site being killed or injured during the construction process. In order to address this risk, the applicant's ecological consultant has recommended the installation of an amphibian fence for the duration of the works. The NCO has advised that provided these measures are implemented, the proposed development would be highly unlikely to result in a breach of the Habitat Regulations. Consequently, it is not necessary for the Council to have regard to the Habitat Regulations during the determination of this application and the impact on the scheme on this species is acceptable.

Bats - A single tree has been identified as having potential to support roosting bats. However, the said tree is located outside of the application site and so would not be affected by the proposed development. Whilst the application site offers limited opportunities for roosting bats, bats are likely to commute and forage around the site to some extent. To avoid any adverse impacts on bats resulting from any lighting associated with the development, if planning permission is granted, a condition should be attached requiring any additional lighting to be agreed.

Badgers - Whilst this species is known to occur in the wider locality, no evidence of a sett was recorded during the latest survey of the application site. This species is not reasonable likely to be significantly affected by the proposed development.

Conditions are recommended requiring the submission of details of lighting, protection of nesting birds and accordance with proposed great crested newt mitigation measures. Subject to this, the scheme is found to be acceptable in terms of nature conservation and compliant with CELPS Policy SE 3 and saved MBLP Policy NE 5.

## **Manchester Airport Safeguarding**

The Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport has assessed the proposed development against the aerodrome safeguarding measures. The creation of the lake as part of the proposals has the potential to increase the risk of Birdstrike to aircraft using Manchester Airport. The application is not supported by any details as to how the site operators would prevent geese and other bird species from that are hazardous to aircraft from becoming established at the site as well as visiting feeding water birds. The pond features also includes an island, which are highly likely to be colonised by nesting geese. Without details of planting and a bird management plan, insufficient information has been submitted with the application to determine the likely threat to aircraft from birdstrike, which is a material consideration. As such, approval of the scheme contrary to the advice of the Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport would be contrary to the advice the Town and Country Planning (safeguarded aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas) Direction 2002.

## **Highway Implications**

The proposed course would be open between 09.00 and 21.00 hrs Mon-Sun and would employ 8 new staff to operate the course. The existing Adlington Golf Centre car park has 163 spaces would be used for the parking requirements of the new adventure course. The Head of Strategic Infrastructure (HSI - Highways) has confirmed that no highways objections are raised on the basis that the proposed new adventure golf course is located at an existing golf centre. The HSI has confirmed that the scheme does not raise any highway concerns in regards to traffic impact or parking. The scheme is found to be acceptable in terms of highways and parking.

## **Residential Amenity**

The nearest residential property, 'Shirdfold Farm', is located some 70 metres of the northern boundary of the proposed Adventure Golf Course. Given that the lawful use of the site is already as a golf course, it is not considered that the proposal would materially harm neighboring amenity by reason of noise. The proposals are also of sufficient distance away so as to not cause material harm by reason of loss of light, visual intrusion or loss of privacy.

## **Public Rights of Way (PROW)**

The proposed development lies adjacent to a Public Right of Way, namely Bridleway No.42 in the parish of Adlington. The Council's Public Rights of Way Unit has confirmed that it is unlikely that the development will impact on the adjacent Bridleway. However, it is recommended that an advice note be attached to any approval reminding the developer of their obligations.

## **Flood Risk and Drainage**

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 where flooding from rivers and the sea is very unlikely with less than a 0.1 per cent (1 in 1000) chance of flooding occurring each year. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment. In the absence of any objection from the Council's Flood Risk Manager, the scheme is found to accord with Policy SE 13 of the CELPS and saved Policy NE 20 of the MBLP.

## **Heritage Assets**

The closest designated heritage asset is the Grade II Listed Lostock Hall Farmhouse to the north. However, the proposed site is far enough away from the building and its curtilage not to directly affect its setting and therefore will be acceptable in this regard. The proposal accords with CELPS Policy SE 7.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PLANNING BALANCE**

The site lies within the North Cheshire Green Belt. National and local policy affords significant protection to the Green Belt. Whilst the existing use of the land is as a golf course, and the proposal for an Adventure Golf Facility would fall within the same use, the proposal would involve the provision of a substantial number of structures and significant engineering operations to re-profile the land. Whilst the provision of buildings (which would also include the themed structures) could be considered as 'appropriate facilities' for outdoor sport and recreation as well as the associated engineering operations, this is subject to their impact on openness.

Taken as a whole, the various structures, features and associated means of enclosure would have a material impact on openness and cause encroachment into the countryside thereby undermining the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. By reason of the harm to openness, the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The benefits of the proposal in terms of promoting the health and wellbeing of users and the positive impact on the local economy including tourism are not enough to outweigh the significant harm to the Green. The proposal is therefore contrary to the advice of the NPPF and Development Plan Policies PG 3 of the CELPS and saved GC1 of the MBLP.

There would also be harm to the landscape, which in this case, carries significant weight against the proposal. The proposed development is more akin to a theme park than part of a golf course and so along with the lack of detail; it is considered that the proposals are contrary to policies SE 1 and SE 4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.

The site lies within the Manchester Airport Safeguarding Zone. Insufficient information has been submitted with the application to determine the likely threat to aircraft from birdstrike, which is a material consideration. Approval of the scheme contrary to the advice of the Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport would be contrary to the advice the Town and Country Planning (safeguarded aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas) Direction 2002.

Comments from the Council's Arboricultural Officer are awaited and will be reported to members by way of an update.

There are no objections on the grounds of residential amenity, ecology, highways, public rights of way, flood risk or heritage assets. However, these considerations do not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, landscape impact and impact on airport safeguarding and so the application is recommend accordingly.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Refuse for the following reasons;**

- 1. Green Belt - The site lies within the North Cheshire Green Belt. The proposed development, whilst not inappropriate development by definition, would lead to a loss of openness and encroachment in the Green Belt. The various structures, features and associated means of enclosure would have a material impact on openness and cause encroachment into the countryside thereby undermining the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. By reason of the harm to openness, the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt. There are not considered to be material considerations that clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of loss of openness and other identified harm. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy PG 3 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and saved Policy GC1 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.**
- 2. Landscape Impact – The proposal would result in the introduction of large features which would appear incongruous in the landscape and countryside, contrary to Policies SE 1 and SE 4 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy.**
- 3. Airport Safeguarding – Insufficient information has been submitted with the application to determine the likely threat to aircraft from birdstrike, which is a material consideration. Approval of the scheme contrary to the advice of the Safeguarding Authority for Manchester Airport would be contrary to the advice the Town and Country Planning (safeguarded aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas) Direction 2002.**

*In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Chairman (or in his absence the Vice Chair) of the Strategic Planning Board to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.*

