

Application No: 11/4495M

Location: WILMSLOW GOLF CLUB, WARFORD LANE, GREAT WARFORD, CHESHIRE, WA16 7AY

Proposal: PROPOSED SWING STUDIO, OUTDOOR PRACTICE AREA, CAR PARKING AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT

Applicant: MR KEITH MELIA

Expiry Date: 02-Mar-2012

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:

Approve subject to conditions

MAIN ISSUES:

- Principle of development – green belt assessment
- Design, character and appearance
- Impact on residential amenity
- Highways and parking
- Impact on trees
- Ecology

1. REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application is included on the agenda of the Northern Planning Committee as the site area is over 1 hectare.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

This application site is part of Wilmslow Golf Club, comprising the existing practice ground which is situated on the eastern side of the golf club. The main access to the golf club is taken from Warford Lane however access to the practice ground is taken from Foden Lane. To the south and west of the site is the golf course, to the north west an agricultural field and to the south east a field used for equestrian purposes. Opposite the site on the eastern side of Ford Lane is a forestry nursery with a residential property Foden House, opposite the north east corner of the site.

Wilmslow Golf Club consists of an 18 hole golf course which has been in its current location since 1909. It has 678 playing members ranging from 7-90+ in various categories including, full, midweek, intermediate, country and overseas. The practice ground was granted permission in 1979 and has been in situ as part of the golf club since.

3. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The application seeks permission for a new building (comprising of a swing studio teaching facility, two undercover practice bays and a WC/changing room and store), an artificial grass tee area, a new extended car park, a putting green, short game area, and engineering operations comprising some ground levelling and formation of bunkers.

4. RELEVANT HISTORY

16781P Change of use from agricultural to practice ground – *Approved 24th January 1979*

5. POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy

- DP1 (Spatial Principles)
- DP2 (Promote Sustainable Communities)
- DP4 (Making the Best Use of Existing Resources and Infrastructure)
- DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality)
- RDF2 (Rural Areas)
- RDF 4 (Green Belts)

Local Plan Policy

- GC1 (New buildings in the green belt)
- BE1 (Design principles for new development)
- DC1 (High quality design for new build)
- DC3 (Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties)
- DC6 (Circulation and Access)
- DC8 (Requirements for Landscaping)
- DC9 (Tree Protection)
- DC33 (Outdoor commercial recreation facilities)

Other Material Considerations

- PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development
- Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change Supplement to PPS1
- PPG 2: Green Belts
- PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas
- Draft National Planning Policy Framework

6. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Environmental Health: Make the following comments:

Areas of concern relating to light overspill and hours of operation have been fully answered in the information submitted in support of this application.

The proposal is not a driving range. The only external lighting detailed is that of “soft lighting to provide directional aides between the building and car park for users in the twilight hours” (paragraph 5.4 Potential Lighting).

The hours of operation proposed are 0830 hrs to 2200 hrs in summer and 0800 to 1700 hrs in winter defined as 1st November to 28th February.

I confirm this section has no objection to the above application.

Highways: The views of the Strategic Highways and Transportation Manager have not been received at the time of writing the report. They will be reported as an update. Following pre-application discussions an objection is not anticipated however formal comments will be reported once received.

7. VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL:

Chorley Parish Council does not object to this application. The following comments were also made:

Our chief concern when viewing any business plans along Foden Lane is of course the number and type of vehicles it might involve. We are satisfied that the architect has provided an entrance with safe and clear visibility for vehicles travelling to the club and along the lane.

Great Warford Parish Council was also consulted as the site abuts the Parish Boundary. The following comments were made

They do not consider the land where the proposed development to be is in the Parish of Great Warford. They trust Chorley PC has responded. No objections to the development were raised but the members are very concerned about the increase in traffic on Foden Lane which is very narrow in places.

8. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:

An anonymous letter of objection has been received in relation to the proposal, the salient points being:

- Foden Lane is narrow with few passing places near the entrance and not suitable for development of this nature due to increase in traffic;
- Noise and disruption for people living in Foden Lane;
- This is a commercial development, and not viable as a members only facility;
- Facility is out of keeping with surroundings, large scale development on a field.

9. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

A Design and Access Statement has been provided and can be seen in full on the planning file however the salient points are:

- The proposed building is in simple form with a mono pitch roof and timber clad;
- The building would have 2 bays, one secured by roller shutter doors;
- The car park would provide 20 spaces;

- To the south east of the car park the proposal includes a putting green enclosed on 2 sides by a 5 metre wide strip of landscaping;
- To the south west of the building the proposal includes a practice teeing area which would be slightly raised;
- The Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment indicates the site is in a Landscape Character Type 10 comprising lower farms and woods. More specifically it is in the Marthall Character Area defined as a medium scale landscape of mixed arable and pastoral farmland;
- The golf course is well planted with mature trees and a large block of woodland in the centre of the course;
- The proposal does not undermine any landscape qualities and would not contribute to any identified issues within the Landscape Character Assessment;
- The proposal does not change the use of the land;
- The building is relatively small and compact. It would be set back from Foden Lane and due to mature vegetation views would be restricted;
- The position of the teaching bay is determined by its location at one end of the practice ground;
- The proposed car park is determined by its proximity of the building and access and it is essential it is positioned to the side of the building so stray balls do not hit cars;
- The proposal includes extensive landscaping including hedge planting to supplement the existing hedgerow and tree planting around the practice ground. There would also be forest planting along the north west boundary;
- The proposal has been discussed with the Highways Department. The visibility splays have been measured and existing visibility is acceptable. The access is unaltered due to the need to retain the large Oak tree immediately south of the access and the retention of the mature hedgerow.
- The car park provides 3 disabled parking spaces and the teaching bay is accessible for disabled people;

A Planning Statement has been provided and can be seen in full on the planning file however the salient points are;

- The substantive use of the site would maintain the openness of the green belt and help support the purposes of including land within it;
- The building would allow teaching and practice to take place all year round and in all weather conditions. This is vital in making the golf professional's business viable.
- The building is essential for outdoor recreation and would not be inappropriate development. It has no unnecessary facilities.
- The proposal has been assessed against the criteria in Policy DC33 and is considered to comply.

10. OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development – Green Belt Assessment

The site is currently in use as a practice ground for the golf club, established under planning application 36364P. The use of the site as a practice facility has therefore been established and this proposal does not involve a material change of use of the land. However the

proposal includes development on the site consisting of alterations to contour levels, a reconfigured car park, amended access drive, laying of an artificial grass tee area, a raised tee, pathway from the car park and a new building providing teaching facilities, undercover tee area, a store and WC.

Policy GC1, which reflects paragraph 3.4 of PPG2, states that within the green belt approval will not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings unless it is for (amongst other things):

‘Essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the green belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.’

Paragraph 1.5 of PPG2 states the purposes for including land within the green belt are:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

PPG2, paragraph 3.5, gives examples of essential facilities as ‘small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or small stables for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation.’ It is worth noting that this list is not exhaustive and does not rule out other such facilities being described as essential. The key question is whether the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that the facilities are genuinely required for the use of land which preserves the openness of the green belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

The proposed building comprises two main elements, a swing studio and two undercover driving bays. A small store and changing room/WC are also provided to the rear of the undercover bays. The swing studio would be used by the golf professional to teach, utilising technology such as radar, cameras, recording equipment and viewing screens. The facility would also allow teaching to take place all year round and in all weather conditions. The submitted Planning Statement contends that the teaching and tuition service provided by the professional are a vital component of making his business viable and allowing year round and all weather facilities would enhance its viability. The facility would allow the Golf Club to compete with other clubs in the area and meet demand for such a facility.

The building would also provide two undercover bays which in proportion to the scale of the site is minimal. This would allow use of the practice ground in all weather conditions. It is clear there are no unnecessary facilities included in the building, a small toilet/changing facility and store are not excessive and can be considered basic requirements. The use of the land as a practice ground has previously been established.

The site is currently used as a practice ground however it does not contain any buildings. There is a small car park adjacent to Foden Lane serving the practice area at present. It is clear therefore that there would be some impact on openness as a result of the proposed

development which involves a building, an enlarged car park and some engineering works to alter land levels. However the development would be minimal and contained mainly in the south east corner of the site. The practice ground is relatively large and the prevailing character and openness of the site would be maintained with limited impact.

It is considered an appropriately worded condition should be added to ensure the facility is not used as a public driving range. A public driving range would be a more intense use, raising additional concerns that would need to be carefully assessed and potentially being of a more semi-urban character. It would also raise other concerns in relation to highways and therefore a condition to this effect is considered necessary.

In conclusion, it is not considered the proposal is inappropriate development in the green belt and therefore it is not necessary to consider whether there are very special circumstances that justify inappropriate development. It is worth noting here that no very special circumstances were put forward by the applicant as they do not consider the development to be inappropriate.

Design, character and appearance

There are no existing buildings on the site that can be utilised and therefore this proposal includes a new building. The position of the building has been determined by the location of the existing established practice ground. Policy DC33 seeks to ensure new buildings are sited in close proximity to existing buildings wherever possible. There are no existing buildings on this practice ground and all existing buildings at the golf club are situated to the west adjacent to Warford Lane. Providing a building near to existing buildings has been disregarded for a number of reasons, mainly that it would require the existing 12th tee and fairway to be used as the practice ground resulting in the reconfiguration of the golf course. This is considered a prohibitive option. Secondly due to the position of an overflow car park and access road to the north of this area it is highly constrained. An indoor studio was also considered however disregarded as it would require a larger building than is being proposed and would not offer the same benefits as an outdoor facility. The existing buildings on the site could not be utilised as they are already in use, either as the clubhouse or for storage of machinery and tools and other uses. The use of these buildings would simply result in pressure for further buildings on the site. Given the proposal is to site a building on an established practice ground which contains no buildings, and the evidence of consideration of alternatives put forward, it is considered that a new building in the location proposed is acceptable.

The building would have a footprint of approximately 103 square metres, being 13.4 metres wide and 7.7 metres deep. It would have a monopitched roof 3.5 metres high at its maximum. It would be clad in timber giving it the appearance of an agricultural building similar to other rural buildings. The building would be well screened from Foden Lane, with limited visibility from public vantage points. The existing hedgerow and trees along the site boundary would screen the development somewhat. The building would be most visible from longer views to the south east where the land is lower than the application site. The proposed planting in the south east corner of the site would enhance the screening of the site. For these reasons it would not be prominent in the landscape setting.

The proposal includes roller shutter doors to the Swing Studio, this is for security purposes given the equipment that would be kept in the building. The undercover bays would be

open fronted. Given the genuine need for security in this aspect is not considered excessive and would serve a particular purpose whilst keeping its impact to a minimum. However a condition should be attached to ensure the doors are painted an appropriate colour.

The site is currently used as a practice ground and is therefore closely mown and has the appearance of a golf course. The proposed level changes and other works including the formation of bunkers would have limited impact on the landscape setting given the appearance of the existing site.

Policy DC33 also requires that any necessary lighting should be accommodated without undue intrusion or significant impact upon the immediate locality or wider environment. The proposal does not include any floodlighting, however lighting is proposed in the form of soft lighting for directional guidance between the car park and the building. The building itself would also have internal lighting, however due to its open nature this would have some external impact. The site is located in a rural area that is characterised by very limited light pollution. There are no street lights along Foden Lane. However the proposed lighting would be extremely limited with no lighting of the fairways or other practice areas. I do not consider it would significantly detract from the character of the area or result in undue intrusion to the character of the countryside. If approved, a condition should be attached to require details of the lighting to ensure it is appropriate. A further condition should also be attached to ensure no floodlighting is installed.

Impact on Residential Amenity

The main concern in relation to residential amenity is the potential intensification of the use of the site, and resulting disturbance to nearby residents. The closest residential property is Foden house which is on the east side of Foden Lane opposite the north east corner of the site. The car park and buildings are to be located on the

The Planning Statement makes reference to complaints in the past from the residents of Ford house in respect of balls straying into their curtilage. This scheme has addressed those concerns by reorienting the practice ground in a southeast/northwest direction. This would help to direct balls away from Foden house and should therefore improve the current situation. Tree planting is also proposed along the boundary with Foden Lane which would 'catch' stray balls and further enhance the situation. The above measures would be sufficient to mitigate any increase in activity at the site.

At present the site has no restrictions on its hours of use, although it is obviously dictated by available daylight. This proposal does not include any floodlighting however hours of use are proposed of 0800 hours to 2200 hours in the summer and 0800 hours to 1700 hours in the winter. Winter is defined as 1st November to 28th February. Further different hours of use are proposed for the building, being 0830 hours to 1800 hours in the summer and 0830 hours to 1600 hours in the winter. These hours are appropriate and would appear to accord with available daylight. The Environmental Health section has no objection to these hours and attaching a condition to this effect would be considered reasonable, given the intensification of use, and they would ensure there is no significant injury to amenities in terms of noise and disturbance.

Whilst the scheme would likely result in some increase in traffic along Foden Lane, this would not be so significant as to significantly harm living conditions for residential properties on the lane.

As previously discussed ball collection and mowing activities would be limited, ball collection would take place once a day, twice a day at busy times. The grass would be mown once a week. This level of activity would not be significant and would not be detrimental to amenities at Foden House.

Highways and Parking

Access to the site is currently taken from Foden Lane. This access will be unchanged. Foden Lane is a narrow country lane which is single track width in places. Highways comments have not been received at the time of writing the report and will therefore be reported as an update however this application was subject to pre-application discussion and no significant issues were raised at that stage.

There would be an increase in traffic as a result of the development as the use would likely intensify due to the improved facilities. The existing access would be retained, this was approved as part of the original application for the practice ground. Although Foden Lane is derestricted, due to its narrow width vehicles are likely to travel much slower than that. At the time of the site visit it was observed that passing traffic was travelling considerably less than 60mph. Further it was observed that the road is infrequently used.

The existing car park is informally laid out with space for 12 cars. The proposal would create a new car park with space for 20 cars. It would be laid with crushed stone and spaces formally delineated by contrasting material. Three of the 20 spaces would be for disabled parking.

Impact on Trees

The proposal includes some level changes to form the practice tee area however these would appear to be outside the root protection area of any existing trees. The existing access will remain and is already compacted within the rooting environment of a group of Alder and two mature Oak trees on the boundary with the road. Any alterations to the surface of the access is unlikely to have any significant impact, however the Council's Arboricultural Officer considers it prudent to ensure any works including vehicular movement/plant associated with the development are controlled by conditions requiring the submission of a method statement and tree protection scheme. These conditions are considered appropriate and reasonable. The proposed building would not impact upon any existing trees.

Ecology

Due to the nature of development it is not anticipated there would be any significant ecological issues. Native landscaping is being proposed which would have ecological benefits. The Nature Conservation Officer has requested that a condition safeguarding nesting birds should be attached to any approval to require a detailed survey prior to any works between 1st March and 31st August.

11. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development relates to an existing established practice ground at Wilmslow Golf Club. This scheme is specifically for enhanced facilities at the site and engineering operations consisting of grading of the land and other landscaping works. As discussed above the proposed building is not considered inappropriate development in accordance with Local Plan Policy GC1 and national guidance in PPG2 and does not conflict with purposes of including land within the green belt. It has been demonstrated it is an essential facility for outdoor recreation. The proposed building has been designed to harmonise with the rural setting and it would not be overly prominent. Development has been kept to a minimum and sensitively designed. There is likely to be an intensification of use of the facility which raises important highways considerations. Foden Lane is a single track road, however the access has previously been approved for the use of the site and it will primarily be for use by members of the golf club and their guests and not a public driving range. All other considerations have been taken into account with particular reference to residential amenity, existing trees on the site and ecology.

Taking the above into account the application is considered acceptable and in accordance with the relevant policies in the development plan. Members are therefore recommended to approve the application.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
2. A01HP - Provision of car parking
3. A01TR - Tree retention
4. A02TR - Tree protection
5. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
6. A03TR - Construction specification/method statement for access
7. A05EX - Details of materials to be submitted
8. A06NC - Protection for breeding birds
9. A08MC - Lighting details to be approved
10. A11LS - Implementation of landscaping scheme submitted with application
11. A13GR - Hours of use - building
12. Hours of use - practice ground
13. No additional lighting shall be installed
14. Details of surfacing materials
15. No grading/mounding other than shown on the approved plans
16. Details of security barrier to be submitted and approved
17. No fencing or netting
18. Use by members of the golf club and pre-booked lessons only

