

Application No: 13/4218M

Location: STYAL GOLF CLUB, STATION ROAD, HANDFORTH, CHESHIRE, SK9 4JN

Proposal: Remodelling of Styal Golf Course incorporating the reconfiguration of six existing holes into five, the development of three new holes on land immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary of the existing golf course, the development of two new ponds and the extension of two existing ponds.

Applicant: Stockport MBC, Cheshire East C, Manchester

Expiry Date: 06-Feb-2013

**Date Report Prepared:** 24 January 2014

#### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Approve subject to conditions

#### **MAIN ISSUES**

- Whether the proposal is acceptable in the Green Belt
- The impact on the character of the area
- The impact the amenity of adjoining residents
- Whether access and parking arrangements are suitable
- The impact of the proposal on existing trees and landscaping
- Ecological impact

#### **REASON FOR REPORT**

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement and under the Council's Constitution is required to be determined by the Strategic Planning Board.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The site comprises part of the existing golf course and an area of open agricultural land to the south / east of the existing course. The site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

## **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application seeks full planning permission to reconfigure six existing holes into five, develop three new holes on land immediately adjacent to the south eastern boundary of the existing golf course, create two new ponds and extend two existing ponds.

It is proposed that the development is carried out in three phases between February 2014 and May 2015:

Phase 1 comprises the construction of the three holes in the new land and a new back tee for hole 8.

Phase 2 comprises the alteration of the existing holes.

Phase 3 entails the construction of a realigned 1st tee, extension of an existing lake, and bunding / tree planting on the southern boundary of the planned new road.

The need to remodel the existing Golf Course has arisen as a result of the proposals that are currently being developed for the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road (A6MARR). The proposed route passes through the northern part of the existing Styal Golf Course.

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

There is a wide range of planning history across the site relating to alterations to the club house, course and driving range, but none is specifically relevant to the current proposal.

## **POLICIES**

### **Local Plan Policy**

NE11 Nature Conservation  
BE1 Design Guidance  
H13 Protecting Residential Areas  
DC1 New Build  
DC3 Amenity  
DC6 Circulation and Access  
DC8 Landscaping  
DC9 Tree Protection  
DC33 Outdoor Commercial Recreation  
DC63 Contaminated land

### **Other Material Considerations**

National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework)

## **CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

Manchester Airport – No objections subject to conditions relating to measures to minimise birdstrike hazard

Stockport MBC – No objections

Environment Agency – No objections subject to condition

Environmental Health – No objections subject to advice note

Public Rights of Way – No objections subject to advice note

Archaeology - No objections subject to condition

Sport England – No objection

Strategic Highways Manager – Comments not received at time of report preparation

## **VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

Styal Parish Council – Styal Parish Council have made a site visit submit the following observations and recommendations regarding the contractors compound:

### **Option 1**

Entry via Sagars Road at the junction with Station Road and Stanneylands Road, to the junction of Sagars Road and Clay Lane, into the compound:

- a. From Station Road/Stanneylands Road junction, Sagars Road is very narrow and not capable of sustaining heavy plant, therefore would require significant improvements/upgrading.
- b. This section of Sagars Road is used daily by numerous horse riders from Dean Dale Manor Farm Stables, normally aware of very small volumes of residential traffic this access use would create unnecessary danger to these riders.
- c. At the junction of Sagars Road/Clay Lane is a large tree which will require protection against possible damage by contractors vehicles, this would reduce the width of the entrance at Clay Lane either side of the dividing hedgerow. The Council will vigorously object to any suggestion that this tree in a quiet rural setting is felled just to create this temporary entrance.
- d. To access the compound easterly up Clay Lane will have to be along the northerly side of the hedgerow (left side entering) as the opposite side would be too close to residence boundary and house, an unacceptable inconvenience and risk.
- e. As the Northerly side of the hedge is in the privately owned field, used for horses, negotiations will be necessary with the land owner.
- f. Horse owners stabling the animals at Dean Farm Stables park their cars at the junction of Sagars Road and Clay Lane which currently cause access and egress problems for Spur Lodge at busy times, this situation would create an impossible scenario for contractors' use.

### **Option 2.**

To access the compound in a westerly direction from Manchester Road Handforth on Sagars Road:

- a. Access via Sagars Road in a westerly direction gives a clear wide and fully visible progress which needs little improvement for contractors activities.
- b. At the junction of Sagars Road and Clay Lane, the road direction changes to northerly (still Sagars Road). The construction of an entrance gate, in the hedgerow at this point, will give clear access to the Contractors Compound or alternatively, to carry on along Sagars Road in

a north- easterly direction for some 100m, so that access would be directly available through existing new double 5 bar locking gates, very recently installed, into the Compound.

c. As in a & b above, Sagars Road and the double gated entrance into the fields has been the means of entry for the farmers farming the fields, and also access to Dean Farm Stables rear access following the change of use from the MoD many years ago.

Styal Parish Council, considering all practicalities and costs, recommend their option 2 as the means of Contractors accessing the temporary compound during modification of the Golf Club site, holes 5, 6 & 7.

Handforth Parish Council – No comments received

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

4 letters of representation have been received objecting to the proposal on the following grounds:

- Further incursion into Green Belt on phase 1.
- Temporary access from Wilmslow Road or Station Road?
- Loss of public right of way.
- Inconvenience to residents during construction.
- Unnecessary new access at western end of Clay Lane.
- Land should be used for housing.
- Proposal will be prejudicial to local plan review.
- Contrary to the duty of the Council to obtain the best value for its land.
- No duty on the Council to provide land to mitigate any loss of land as a result of the MARR scheme.
- No replacement land or compensation for loss is being provided or paid at golf course in Styal.
- If the Council were to proceed to dispose of its land for less than best value, then it would inevitably open itself (and its Councillors on a personal basis) to liability for any loss.

One letter has also been received raising no objection, noting that it will enhance the area.

## **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The information that has been submitted alongside the plans, drawings and Environmental Statement include:

- i) Planning Statement
- ii) Environmental Site Assessment
- iii) Contamination Risk Assessment
- iv) Geophysical Report
- v) Supplementary Environmental Monitoring Report
- vi) Tree Survey

## vii) Flood Risk Assessment

The planning statement concludes:

- The need to remodel the existing Golf Course has arisen as the proposed route for the A6 MARR passes through the northern part of the existing Styal Golf Course;
- The proposed development is required within the timescales identified to ensure that the Golf Course would not be significantly disrupted by the new road;
- In general, the proposed development complies with planning policies;
- Feedback received during the consultation has been considered and where appropriate incorporated within the design of the Golf Course.
- The ES highlights that overall, there are no substantial or sustained adverse impacts that would be generated by the proposed development that would indicate that permission should not be granted.
- The FRA highlights that the proposed development is classified as “Water-compatible development” land use classification under the NPPF and is within Flood Zone 1.
- Full ground investigation surveys have been undertaken in agreement with CEC contaminated land officer.

## OFFICER APPRAISAL

### **Sustainable development**

At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Whilst there are public transport options in the vicinity of the site, it is unlikely that these would be widely used by users of the golf course given the need to transport equipment. However, there is no doubt that as a form of outdoor sport and recreation it will serve to support the community's health and social well-being. Given that the proposal does not increase the level of activity on the site as it is a reconfiguration of the existing course, it is considered to be broadly neutral in terms of its sustainability credentials, when compared to the existing situation on site.

Sport England has confirmed that the proposal is consistent with both Sport England policy objectives to protect and enhance existing sports facilities, and paragraph 74 of Framework, which seeks to restrict buildings on existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land.

Therefore, the key question is whether there are any significant adverse impacts arising from the proposals that would weigh against the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

### **Green Belt**

Paragraph 89 and 90 of the Framework identify the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Included within the paragraph 90 exceptions are engineering operations provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt. The proposed development site comprises engineering operations to reconfigure 9 of the existing 18 holes at the course. The incursion into the Green Belt referred to in one of the letters of representation identifies the location of some of the drainage works for the new holes.

Whilst there would be some works to alter the contours of the land, the change in levels is considered to be relatively limited in its extent. No new buildings or structures are proposed

and as such the proposal is considered to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Similarly, there is not considered to be any conflict with the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt. It is therefore considered that the proposal is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

### **Amenity**

Local Plan policies H13, DC3 and DC38 seek to protect the amenity of residential occupiers. Policy DC3 states that development should not significantly injure the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential property due to matters such as loss of privacy, overbearing effect, loss of sunlight and daylight and traffic generation and car parking.

There are a number of private residential dwellings scattered around the vicinity of the proposed works. The reconfigured course comes within particularly close proximity of the properties on Clay Lane. However, golf is not a particularly noisy activity, and a landscape buffer zone of approximately 20 metres has been retained to the edge of Clay Lane. No significant amenity issues are raised.

### **Highways**

Formal comments from the Strategic Highways Manager are awaited. Given that the proposal is to reconfigure the existing course as opposed to creating additional facilities, it is not anticipated that the proposal would significantly affect the number of staff or visitors to the site or the parking requirements. Access and parking is proposed to remain as existing.

The management of construction traffic will be the main highways impact arising from the proposal. The comments from the Parish Council are noted in this regard. The views of the Strategic Highways Manager will be reported in an update.

### **Trees / Landscape**

Trees within the application site are currently not statutorily protected by a Tree Preservation Order, or lie within a Conservation Area. A Tree Preservation Order affords protection to trees to the north within 'The Grange', Clay Lane, which lies outside of the application site.

A restricted byway RB87 (Clay Lane) runs to the south of the site and there are a number of public rights of way (PROW) which cross the site including FP119 adjacent to 'The Grange' and FP10 to the north where trees are visible as public amenity features.

This application is supported by a Tree Survey, which assesses 33 individual trees, 23 groups of trees and one Hawthorn hedge located within the site and provides a tree quality assessment based upon the arboricultural, landscape and cultural categories defined in Table 1 of BS5837:2012.

The report concludes that there are two High Quality (A category) trees; 27 Moderate Quality (B category) individual trees; 11 Moderate Quality (B category ) trees; 3 Low Quality (C category) trees; 12 Low Quality (C Category) groups of trees and one (U category) tree that is unsuitable for retention. The one hedgerow identified within the application site has been assessed as Low category. Individual trees are predominately mature Oak and Ash with

occasional Silver Birch. Tree groups comprise of mixed species of Hawthorn, Holly, Ash, Alder, Cherry, Lime, Plane and Willow with two groups comprising of only Oak.

The report identifies eight individual trees and 13 groups for removal to accommodate the proposal. Of these five individual trees are B (Moderate category), two are C (low category) and one tree is deemed U category (unsuitable for retention). Of the 14 groups for removal, 4 are B (moderate category) and 10 groups are C (low category). The impact has been identified as minor negative at local level.

It is noted that a Hawthorne hedge (H1) is also shown for removal. The Arboricultural report identifies this as C (low) category hedgerow, and its removal is considered to be acceptable.

Changes in levels and other construction works including installation of field drains will impact upon the Root Protection Area (RPA) of 9 individual trees and 1 group. The impact of this has been identified as negative at site level only.

The report proposes mitigation to minimise the impact upon the rooting environment of trees and states field drains will not be installed within the RPA of certain trees, with restrictive working within the RPA of others. The Arboricultural Consultant will be notified if during the course of development works will be required within the RPA of trees.

Individual tree losses comprise of 25% of the total number of trees within the site. The loss of groups of trees is one third of the total number of groups within the site. Significant planting is proposed in mitigation for losses, which includes woodland planting, standard trees and hedgerow planting, totalling some 3,275 trees. Provided that management and maintenance is secured, it is agreed in the long term this would provide a net benefit in mitigation for the loss of trees.

The proposed golf course development would not have a significant impact on the character of the wider landscape or have any significant visual impacts. The impact upon the character of the area is therefore considered to be acceptable. The proposal complies with policies BE1, DC1 and DC8 of the Local Plan.

The landscape proposals include a high number of Ash trees which should not be planted due to Ash die back disease. If the application is approved, landscape conditions are recommended to allow the planting proposals to be amended to omit the Ash, add some additional hedgerow gapping on Clay Lane and to ensure that the species mixes comply with any recommendations from MAPLC. A ten year management plan would be advisable to ensure that the habitats establish successfully.

## **Ecology**

The nature conservation officer has made the following comments on the application:

### Protected Species

#### *Badgers*

Whilst badgers are active in this broad locality there is no evidence of badgers being active on site and therefore badgers are unlikely to be directly affected by the proposed development.

### *Great Crested Newts*

The initial Great Crested Newt survey visits undertaken under poor weather conditions which may have constrained the survey and reduced confidence in the overall results. Despite the constraints of the survey Great Crested Newts have been recorded breeding at a number of ponds both within and adjacent to the boundary of the proposed development. In the absence of mitigation the proposed development would have a HIGH level adverse impact on this species through the loss of terrestrial habitat the loss/modification of breeding habitat and the risk of animals being killed or injured during the construction process.

To mitigate the adverse impacts of the proposed development the applicant is proposing to provide two additional replacement ponds and to trap and exclude amphibians from the development foot print. The proposed scheme will provide a net increase of approximately 1.5ha of semi natural broadleaved woodland and scrub, an increase in 0.3ha of standing water and a fall of 1.5ha of grasslands. This work would be undertaken under the terms of a Natural England licence.

Article 12 (1) of the EC Habitats Directive requires Member states to take requisite measures to establish a system of strict protection of certain animal species prohibiting the deterioration or destruction of breeding sites and resting places.

In the UK, the Habitats Directive is transposed as The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. This requires the local planning authority to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive so far as they may be affected by the exercise of those functions.

It should be noted that since a European Protected Species has been recorded on site and is likely to be adversely affected by the proposed development, the planning authority must consider the tests in respect of the Habitats Directive, i.e. (i) that there is no satisfactory alternative, (ii) that the development is of overriding public interest, and (iii) that the favourable conservation status of the species will be maintained. Evidence of how the LPA has considered these issues will be required by Natural England prior to them issuing a protected species license.

Current case law instructs that if it is considered clear, or very likely, that the requirements of the Directive cannot be met because there is a satisfactory alternative or because there are no conceivable "other imperative reasons of overriding public interest" then planning permission should be refused. Conversely if it seems that the requirements are likely to be met, then there would be no impediment to planning permission in this regard. If it is unclear whether the requirements would be met or not, a balanced view taking into account the particular circumstances of the application should be taken.

### Alternatives

As noted above, the need to remodel the existing Golf Course has arisen as a result of the proposals that are currently being developed for the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road (A6MARR). The works need to be carried out in advance of the road to allow the golf course to remain operational, to protect this important local business / leisure facility. Given that the proposed road crosses the northern section of the site, and having regard to the availability of land that could be used to accommodate the alterations to the course, the reconfigured areas



need to be located in the areas proposed. Taking these factors into account it would be reasonable to conclude that there are no satisfactory alternatives.

#### Overriding public Interest

The development is required to facilitate the route of the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road (A6MARR). This is a significant infrastructure project which is capable of being considered of overriding public interest.

#### Mitigation

The nature conservation officer advises that the proposed great crested newt mitigation/compensation is acceptable, and will maintain the favourable conservation status of the species.

On the basis of the above it is considered reasonably likely that the requirements of the Habitats Directive would be met.

#### *Bats*

A number of trees have been identified as having potential to support roosting bats however it appears that these will be retained as part of the development. The proposed development is unlikely to have a significant adverse impact upon bats.

#### *Breeding birds*

Due to the removal of vegetation, if planning consent is granted a condition requiring a detailed survey to check for nesting birds is recommended.

#### *Hedgerows*

Hedgerows are a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat and hence a material consideration. The north eastern boundary hedge has been identified as being species rich. The submitted Environmental Statement (ES) states that this hedgerow will be retained as part of the development.

Other than the north eastern boundary hedge, the ES states that species rich hedgerows are not present within the scheme boundary and those hedgerows that are present within the site are species-poor examples and therefore not of intrinsic biodiversity value.

It is also important to emphasise the total increase in woodland planting that is proposed within the scheme. An increase of 1.1ha of semi-natural broadleaved woodland is proposed, which will provide the same ecological function as a hedgerow, but will provide a larger habitat of greater benefit. Species poor hedgerows that are proposed for removal, such as that within the footprint of the proposed fairway on hole 2 are not connected to habitats at both ends and hence serve a reduced purpose. Furthermore, in addition to that shown on the landscaping layout scrub planting will be provided in linear features between the fairways. There are clear biodiversity benefits that offered as part of the proposal and any loss is adequately mitigated for.

#### *Aquatic Invertebrates and water voles*

The nature conservation officer initially raised concern that aquatic invertebrate and water vole surveys had not been undertaken of any pond affected by the proposed development. The applicants have responded to confirm that the suitability of the site was assessed for

water vole habitat and it was found to be of very poor water vole potential and therefore surveys were not considered to be necessary. Similarly, whilst the Mud Snail has been identified at Manchester Airport, the ponds within the application site are not suited to them; as is the case with the Lesser Silver Diving Beetle. The nature conservation officer confirms that these species are unlikely to be present or affected by the development.

Overall, the proposal is considered to provide an enhancement of nature conservation interests generally by providing increased areas of habitat, as well as acceptable mitigation for protected species. The proposal therefore complies with policy NE11 of the Local Plan and the Framework.

### **Air Safety**

Comments have been received from Manchester Airport who advise that the site is located within a critical area for aircraft operations, therefore careful consideration needs to be given to any birdstrike hazard that may be created as a result of the development. The Airport raises no objections subject to a number of conditions aimed at minimising this risk.

### **Contaminated land**

The contaminated land officer raises no objections to the proposal. The Environment Agency has also reviewed the submitted Contamination Risk Assessment Report that was submitted as part of this application, and is satisfied that the risks to controlled waters are low. They raise no objections subject to the applicant informing the local authority in the event that any unforeseen contamination is found. As this issue is dealt with by Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it is considered that an advice note on the decision notice is an appropriate way to deal with this.

### **Public Rights of Way**

Public Footpath No. 10 Wilmslow, as recorded on the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way runs through the application site. Public Footpath No's 11 and 119 and Restricted Byway No. 87 Wilmslow are also adjacent to the site. The works are not expected to affect the public right of way, which will remain as existing, although a temporary diversion may be necessary. If the development will temporarily affect the right of way then the developer must apply for a temporary closure of the route (preferably providing a suitable alternative route). The PROW Unit will take such action as may be necessary, including direct enforcement action and prosecution, to ensure that members of the public are not inconvenienced in their use of the way both during and after development work has taken place.

The rights of way officer has noted that the development may offer the opportunity to upgrade of this footpath to the legal status of public bridleway, in order to permit cyclists and horse riders to use the route. However, given that the proposal will not result in any greater impact upon this footpath, any upgrade is not considered to be necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.

### **Archaeology**

The Environmental Statement includes an archaeological desk-based assessment. The Council's archaeologist has advised that the site is identified as having limited archaeological potential. It is, however, acknowledged that some of the field boundaries on the site pre-date the tithe map of 1841 and may be of some antiquity. It is suggested that where these are to be removed by development work, a section should be recorded across the field boundary in

order to make a record of its form and, perhaps, recover dating evidence. This modest programme of archaeological mitigation can be carried out as part of the development process and may be secured by condition.

### **Agricultural land**

The land to the south into which the Golf Course would extend into is primarily used for grazing livestock and is classified as Grade 3, which is good to moderate quality agricultural land. This land parcel is owned by CEC and would be bought by agreement.

The Framework states that:

*“Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality.”*

The change of use of the land is required to facilitate the proposed A6-MARR road proposals, which will provide its own public benefits. In addition the proposal will ensure the continued operation of the golf club, an important local business and amenity facility, and an enhancement for nature conservation interests. The need and benefits of the development is considered to outweigh the loss of agricultural land in this case.

### **Other matters**

The comments from the Parish Council regarding construction access are acknowledged. However, as noted above the views of the Strategic Highways Manager are awaited, therefore this matter will be addressed in an update. In the event of any outstanding issues a construction management plan could be conditioned.

A condition is required relating to the restoration of the golf course land (that would be lost to the road scheme) in the event that the A6-MARR does not go ahead. The proposal is for the reconfiguration of the course, not an extension to it. Extending the golf club would need to be assessed as a separate application on its merits.

With regard to the comments received in representation not addressed above, the site is identified in the SHLAA as being not currently developable. The site is located within the Green Belt, and therefore housing would be an inappropriate form of development, as opposed the current proposal which is not inappropriate.

The value of the land is not a material planning consideration, and issues relating to the sale of the land will need to be dealt with separately to the planning application.

The inconvenience to residents during construction will be a temporary manifestation of the development process. However, this can be minimised through the use of an hours of construction condition, and a construction method statement (subject to the comments from the Strategic Highways Manager).

### **CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

The proposal is considered to be an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt. The openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt will be adequately maintained. The proposal will not result in any significant injury to the amenity of nearby residential properties. The impacts on ecology have been satisfactorily addressed, and in some cases enhanced. The visual and landscape impacts of the development are acceptable. No significant environmental effects have been identified.

The proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development under the definition of The Framework. The proposal is in accordance with the relevant policies of the Development Plan.

Subject to the comments of the Strategic Highways Manager, the proposal is not considered to generate any adverse traffic or highway safety issues.

Consequently, for the reasons outlined above, there are not considered to be any significant adverse impacts that would outweigh the presumption in favour of sustainable development in this case. The application is recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A01LS - Landscaping - submission of details
4. A04LS - Landscaping (implementation)
5. A16LS - Submission of landscape/habitat management plan
6. A22GR - Protection from noise during construction (hours of construction)
7. Breeding bird survey to be submitted
8. Development to be carried out in accordance with submitted GCN mitigation strategy
9. Written scheme of archaeological investigation to be submitted
10. Maintenance of grassed areas around ponds
11. Avoidance and removal of wildfowl nesting sites
12. Access for agents of Manchester Airport
13. Measures to prevent earth works becoming a bird attractant to be submitted
14. Scheme to be submitted for restoration of the site in the event the A6-MARR scheme does not go ahead



## Styal Golf Course Redevelopment Planning Application Location Plan

Drawing Ref: S20/P/21

GIS Task Ref: 4170\_7

Scale 1:4000 @ A3

26/09/13

-  Extent of Planning Application  
(399,000 sq metres)
-  Area within Red Line Excluded  
from Planning Application

