

**OS Parcel 0039**  
**South West of Heathfield Village**  
**Islip Road, Bletchington**  
**Oxfordshire**

**12/00696/F**

**Ward:** Kirtlington

**District Councillor:** Simon Holland

**Case Officer:** Graham Wyatt

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Applicant:** Mr Geoff Robbins & Ms Jo Holmes

**Application Description:** Proposed driving range, pro-shop, refreshment area and ancillary environmental works.

**Committee Referral:** Major

## **1. Site Description and Proposed Development**

- 1.1 The site forms an open parcel of land at the B4027 entrance to Heathfield village. The land is currently laid to grass with mature hedging forming the boundary for the site. The site lies within the Green Belt. Public footpath FP134/13 runs north of the site.
- 1.2 The proposal seeks permission to change the use of the land from agricultural land to a golf driving range. As part of the development, a single building comprising 19 golf driving bays, a reception and refreshment area, retail element, staff room and maintenance store are proposed. The development originally proposed a mobile home as part of the scheme. This element has since been removed from the proposal and is not for consideration.
- 1.3 The applicant proposes to increase landscaping at the site and to provide floodlighting for evening and winter use of the site. A parking area and access road will also be provided.

## **2. Application Publicity**

- 2.1 The application has been advertised by way of site notice erected at the entrance to the site. The final date for comment was the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2012. One letter of correspondence from the Mr. Scargill of the Oxford Green Belt Network has been received commenting on the following material planning considerations:

- We believe that what the present application proposes goes well beyond what is acceptable in terms of preserving openness and that it must therefore be regarded as inappropriate development which is harmful to the Green Belt.
- The site in question is some distance from the nucleus of Heathfield village and would thus extend development into open countryside.
- This is an ongoing commercial expansion which is gradually eroding the Green Belt in the vicinity of Heathfield.

### 3. Consultations

- 3.1 **Bletchington Parish Council** – The parish council were re-consulted as a result of the applicant removing the mobile home from the scheme. The Parish responded to the initial consultation as follows: ‘The Parish Council is extremely concerned about traffic movements on and off the B4027. Permission was recently granted for a 150 mobile homes to enter Heathfield via the ‘road’ from the B4027, with no thought regarding the danger of traffic coming from the A34 and turning in at this point. The driving range shows parking for 30 vehicles which will exacerbate the traffic movements.
- 3.2 The driving range is a distraction so close to the B4027. Councillors feel that if the range is open during dark evenings the floodlights could dazzle drivers. They also seek reassurance that something would be installed to prevent golf balls coming through the hedge alongside the B4207.
- 3.3 There is no need for accommodation at the site.

#### **Cherwell District Council Consultees**

- 3.4 **Ecologist:** “The field proposed for conversion into a golf driving range does not contain any rare habitats or protected species. There is a badger record for the site, but no evidence of a badger sett was found. The landscaping plan shows that the following enhancement measures will be incorporated into the scheme:
- additional tree planting
  - two new 'conservation' ponds
  - small areas of meadow grassland
- 3.5 Whilst all these features will help enhance the site for biodiversity I don't see any further detail as to the design of the ponds and the species of tree, aquatic plants or meadow grasses to be planted. More detailed information on this, as well as the future management of the trees, hedgerows, grassland and ponds would be useful, to ensure that only native species are used and that the management will be appropriate to ensure these features benefit biodiversity in the long-term. This could be done by condition, through the production of a management plan with detailed planting scheme.”
- 3.6 **Landscape Officer** – No response received.
- 3.7 **Rights of Way Officer** – No response received.

#### **Oxfordshire County Council Consultees**

- 3.8 **Highways Liaison Officer:** The rural location of the site places high dependency on private car to access the site. However, given the recreational use and associated accommodation, I do not consider location, in terms of sustainability, to be grounds for refusal.
- 3.9 Roads immediately adjacent the site are not public highway, the B4027 being the highway boundary both where it forms the slip to the A34 and at the access

road close to Frogsnest Farm. The access nearest to Frogsnest Farm would provide the most logical route for visitors from beyond the village and I consider this access would provide appropriately for the expected increase in traffic associated to the proposed development.

- 3.10 The adjacent highway is unlit and any floodlighting must not have any adverse effect upon the highway; light sources must not be visible directly from the highway and light spill to the highway must be no more than 1 LUX.
- 3.11 Adequate provision is made for parking and turning away from the public highway. SUDS must be incorporated where appropriate.

### **Other Consultees**

- 3.10 **Thames Valley Police** – Historically this area is described as a low crime area. I have the following comments to make; Unfortunately golf courses and driving ranges are often in isolated locations and are easy targets for offenders to commit crimes such as burglary and theft from pro shops, theft of money from vending machines and ball dispensing machines and theft from motor vehicles. There are a number of mitigating measures that can be incorporated within the design that may reduce opportunity for crime to happen at this venue. A condition requiring CCTV is suggested.

## **4. Relevant National and Local Policy and Guidance**

### **4.1 Development Plan Policy**

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan (Saved Policies)

- GB1: Development within the Green Belt
- GB2: Change of use within the Green Belt
- C2: Protected species
- C7: Landscape conservation
- C8: Sporadic development within the countryside
- C28: Layout, design and external appearance of new development

South East Plan 2009

- CC1: Sustainable development
- CC4: Sustainable design and construction
- CO4: Green Belt
- T4: Parking
- NRM5: Conservation and improvement of biodiversity
- BE1: Management for an urban renaissance

### **4.2 Other Material Policy and Guidance**

National Planning Policy Framework

## **5 Appraisal**

- 5.1 The key issues for consideration in this application are:
- Impact on the Green Belt;
  - Impact on road safety and parking;

## **Impact on the Green Belt**

- 5.2 The site lies within the Oxfordshire Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 (NPPF) attaches great importance to Green Belts and states that it is its fundamental aim to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristic of Green Belt land is its openness and their permanence.
- 5.3 The NPPF states at paragraph 87 that, 'As with previous Green Belt policy [PPG2], inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.' It continues at paragraph 89 by stating that, 'A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate development in Green Belt. Exceptions are, among other things, the provision for appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.'
- 5.4 This guidance is echoed in Policy GB1 of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 which states that, 'Inside the green belt, approval will not be given, except in very special circumstances, for development other than for agriculture, forestry, recreation, cemeteries, or for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the green belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it...Care will be taken to ensure that the visual amenities of the green belt 'are not injured by development within, or conspicuous from, the green belt which, although not prejudicial to its main purpose, might be inappropriate by reason of siting, materials or design.'
- 5.5 Policy GB2 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 states that,
- The change of use of land within the green belt for outdoor recreation purposes will normally be permitted provided:
- (i) there is no overriding agricultural objection;
- (ii) the visual impact on the rural landscape is not unduly harmful;
- (iii) there is no conflict with other policies in this plan.
- Planning permission for new buildings related to such uses will only be granted if they are small in scale and it can be demonstrated that they are essential and ancillary to the use of the land and can be located unobtrusively.
- 5.6 Therefore, the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation facilities is not considered inappropriate development within the Green Belt, providing its use and any buildings preserves its openness.
- 5.7 The proposed development seeks to change the use of the land from agricultural to a golf driving range. In order for the driving range to operate, a building is proposed that provides three elements; driving bays where

customers practice golf, a reception with ancillary sales area, a refreshment area including customer toilets, changing room and staff rest room. A maintenance store (which will include equipment to maintain the range, mower, ball collector etc.). The building provides the following floorspace for each element:

Reception and sales area (including staff rest area) = c.57 sq. m  
Refreshment and training area (including changing room) = c.57 sq. m  
Maintenance store = c.16 sq. m  
Driving range bays = c.270 sq. m

- 5.8 The building would have a mono-pitch roof with a height of 3m rising to 3.8m over the driving bays. The building would be constructed of green oak under a roof that will be covered in grass. Extensive landscaping is also proposed which includes reed beds, meadows, ponds and bunds to both enhance biodiversity at the site and to allow the built development sit comfortably within the site.
- 5.9 Access to the site will be via the existing road off the B4027. A new access serving the driving range will be created some 220m off the main road (north east) and double back on itself to a parking area for 25 vehicles and the driving range itself.
- 5.10 Both the NPPF and local plan policies support the provision of outdoor sports within the Green Belt providing the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The Oxford Green Belt Network have objected to the proposal stating that the development is, 'well beyond what is acceptable in terms of preserving openness and that it must therefore be regarded as inappropriate development which is harmful to the Green Belt.'
- 5.11 However, the proposal is for outdoor sport which is clearly not an inappropriate use within the Green Belt. It is whether the facilities proposed would impact on the openness of the Green Belt that is for consideration and therefore inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
- 5.12 The facilities proposed are not considered significant. The bays are appropriate and required for the driving range. A reception area to greet customers along with a small amount of retail ( a room approximately 7 x 8m) and a further room for refreshment (no alcohol is to be served) and training room (approximately 7 x 8m) and a maintenance store are, in my opinion appropriate facilities required for the outdoor sport that would be provided. Moreover, the actual built environment would be contained to the north-west of the site with the remainder remaining largely unaltered save for landscaping and biodiversity enhancements proposed.
- 5.13 It is not considered that the building represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt that would fail to preserve its openness. The building and use is considered an acceptable form of development that would provide an opportunity for outdoor sport in the Green Belt. Moreover, the building has been appropriately and sensitively designed and would preserve the openness of the Green Belt in this area.

### **Other Matters**

- 5.14 The applicant has stated that to allow the driving range to be used during the winter, floodlighting is proposed. The hours of operation would be from 0800hrs to 2100hrs. The details of proposed lighting has not been provided. The Highway Engineer has expressed a concern that lighting may affect drivers using the B4027 and details must be provided to ensure that light does not spill onto the road, affecting road safety. As a result, a condition requiring details of proposed lighting will be placed upon any permission granted.
- 5.15 Continuing with road safety, the Parish Council have raised a concern that the access may not be safe as the Council recently approved an application for a caravan park (not mobile homes as suggested) that would use the same access. However, the Highway Engineer has assessed the proposal and is satisfied that the development will not impact on road safety.
- 5.16 The Ecologist also welcomes the opportunity to enhance biodiversity in the area. However, landscaping details submitted are limited and the applicant states they aware that additional details need to be submitted to satisfy a condition regarding landscaping.
- 5.17 The proposal does not seek to alter or divert the existing right of way that runs along the existing access road that serves Heathfield Village and the site. A new access will be taken off the access road and a planning note will advise the applicant that planning permission does not convey a right to block or divert the right of way.
- 5.17 Thames Valley Police have suggested that the applicant contact the Crime Prevention Design Officer to discuss ways of deterring crime at the site. A planning note provides contact details.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.18 The proposed development is not considered inappropriate development within the Green Belt and will provide an outdoor sporting facility in line with the advice within the National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 and local plan policies. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable and is recommended for approval.

### **5. Recommendation**

**Approval**, subject to the following conditions:

- 1 That the development to which this permission relates shall be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason - To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 Except where otherwise stipulated by conditions attached to this

permission, the development shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the following plans and documents: Design and Access Statement Reference 12013 dated 18.04.2012, drawing 12013:03 A, 12013:04 A, 12013:05 A

Reason – For the avoidance of doubt, to ensure that the development is carried out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority and comply with Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 That the external walls and roof(s) of the development shall be constructed in accordance with a schedule of materials and finishes which shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the works hereby approved.

Reason - To ensure the satisfactory appearance of the completed development and to comply with Policy BE1 of the South East Plan 2009 and Policy C28 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.

- 4 That no development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority a scheme for landscaping the site which shall include:-

- (a) details of the proposed tree and shrub planting including their species, number, sizes and positions, together with grass seeded/turfed areas,
- (b) details of the existing trees and hedgerows to be retained as well as those to be felled, including existing and proposed soil levels at the base of each tree/hedgerow and the minimum distance between the base of the tree and the nearest edge of any excavation,
- (c) details of the hard surface areas, pavements, pedestrian areas, crossing points and steps.

Reason - In the interests of the visual amenities of the area, to ensure the creation of a pleasant environment for the development and to comply with Policy C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and Policy C28 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan.

- 5 That all planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s) or on the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and that any trees and shrubs which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become 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 for any variation.

Reason - In the interests of the visual amenities of the area, to ensure the creation of a pleasant environment for the development and to comply with Policy C4 of the South East Plan 2009 and Policy C28 of the adopted

Cherwell Local Plan.

6. That a scheme of floodlighting for the driving range, which shall include location of lighting columns, make and type of lighting unit, light source type, hours of operation and iso-lux diagram shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to their installation. No lighting other than approved scheme shall be implemented.

Reason - In the interests of highway safety, to ensure a satisfactory standard of construction and layout for the development and to comply with Government advice in the National Planning Policy Framework March 2012

#### **Planning Notes**

1. No development shall take place across any public footpath/right of way unless and until it has been legally stopped up or diverted.
2. The applicant should consult with the local Crime Prevention Design Advisor and incorporate recommended target hardening measures to reduce opportunity for crime to include measures such as appropriate doors, windows, lighting, alarms, CCTV, emergency 'help' call for the on site manager and good money management of coin operated machines on site. Telephone 01844 264938 for further information

#### **Summary of Reasons for the Grant of Planning Permission and Relevant Development Plan Policies**

The Council, as local planning authority, has determined this application in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The development is considered to be acceptable on its planning merits as the proposed development is of a design, size and style that is appropriate in its context and would not have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the area, the Green Belt, traffic safety or the amenities of adjoining occupiers. As such the proposal is in accordance with Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework March 2012, saved policy GB1, GB2, C2, C7, C8 and C30 of the Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 and policy BE1, CC1, CC4, CO4, T4, and NRM5 of the South East Plan 2009. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised including third party representations the Council considers that the application should be approved and planning permission granted subject to appropriate conditions as set out above.