



Head of Planning & Development

Buckinghamshire Council

Via Planning Portal

26th February 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Chiltern Forest Golf Club

Please find a planning application and appropriate fee of £293 for the erection of a single storey timber building providing an enclosed cabin and an open sided gazebo for use as a halfway house where refreshments can be provided to users of the course and pedestrian passers-by who use the adjacent footpath.

The following plans and information are submitted in support of the application:

Plan and Elevations 1:50 scale.

West Elevation 1:50 scale.

Site Plan and East elevation 1:100 scale.

Site Location Plan 1. 1:2500 scale.

Site Location Plan 2. 1:2500 scale.

Suppliers Specification.

Suppliers Image.

Photographs of Site and Setting.

Background

By way of background, Chiltern Forest Golf Club is an established and successful club, operated in the interests of its 500 members through an elected Management Committee. The club own the course that has evolved from being a private 6-hole course owned by the Rothschild family, to a nine hole course operated by the RAF and into the 18-hole course of the present day. Much of the course development through the years has been achieved through the voluntary work of members and this remains the case today. The club welcomes playing visitors and hosts a number of events, including charity competitions each year. Initiatives are also being actively pursued to attract new entrants to golf and to support new members. The club now hosts regular monthly meetings of ForeBusiness, a local business networking group who combine meetings with the option to play golf. We are a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC), and so are particularly concerned about making the club accessible to the local community.

The developed facilities that support the course are located in three locations; the clubhouse and car park to the south-east; a paved patio and toilet block, close to the western boundary, and the maintenance depot and related buildings towards the centre of the site. The site enjoys two points

of access from Aston Hill. One serving the clubhouse and car park and the second, normally locked and only used for depot deliveries.

The clubhouse and car park sit well in the slope of the site and are both very well screened from the public highway. The top end of the course enjoys stunning views out over lower lying land to the north and east. The landscape and ecological value of the course is high, being part of the Chilterns escarpment and within the AONB. The course contains established woodland, scrub and wild margins to fairways and grassland hosting a broad variety of native species. In recent years members have worked with the Chiltern Rangers to clear snowberry and thin the alder trees in parts of the course to improve the habitat for plants, birds and insects. New hedges have also been planted as part of this initiative, and an area of field, owned by the club, set aside for wild flowers. Specialists have also been invited to the club to host walks for members and guests to see butterflies, birds and bats, and members of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust often visit the site. The grounds staff manage the course in a manner that safeguards its landscape and ecological value.

To ensure that the club continues to remain attractive to users, a range of improvements have been undertaken to both the course and the buildings in recent years. In the main clubhouse, the changing rooms have been renovated and the roof is undergoing a phased programme of repair. The clubhouse patio was extended through the provision of a lower deck and this received planning permission last year. In 2021 the concrete base of the former clubhouse was paved to provide a better surface for a halfway house facility, being adjacent to the 9th hole green and located between the 9th hole green and the 10th hole tee. In 2023 the toilet block immediately to the north of the paved patio was refurbished and older outdated facilities removed, including a shower.

A halfway house for refreshment/snacks has been set up under a gazebo to service golf events during the summer months for the last few years. It takes time to set up and has not provided the best conditions for those staffing it or shelter for those golfers using the facility. The application proposal seeks to provide a better facility to support major club events together with meeting the requirements of visiting golf societies and other groups that hold events at the course, all of which are vital to income stream of the club. In addition, covered accommodation would allow a vending machine that could be accessed throughout the year. The main clubhouse is too far removed from the 9th green to provide this facility (approximately 340 metres away) without causing major time disruption to play.

Design approach

The chosen building is ready made for self-assembly by a specialist company and is attractive to the Club because it is of ideal size and design. It can be erected quickly by club staff/volunteers without disrupting the operation of the course or the movement of pedestrians using the public footpath that follows the tarmac surfaced roadway adjacent to the site. The availability of the building in a natural spruce pine boarded finish will allow the structure to be stained in a mid-brown finish and to naturally weather. The finish will be similar to the timber doors on the adjacent toilet block.

The building will fit well on the existing paved patio, well clear of the roadway that leads to the service gate to Aston Hill, immediately to the south. The building is sited close to the western boundary of the course, beyond which is a strip of tree covered land extending to the road. This landscaped strip of land forms part of the site of the old chalk pit to the north. This tree screen is imposing and provides a dense summer screen, forming part of the longer tree screen that separates the course from the public road to the west.

The height of the building is 2.46m to the front with a gentle mono pitch down to the rear where the height is 2.17m. There are no openings in the rear wall or at the northern side of the cabin element. The southern gazebo side of the building has two open sides with the roof supported at the front by a corner post. The width of six metres and depth of three metres will result in a building of modest proportions that has a domestic scale. The existing toilet block is located 2 metres from the side retaining wall of the patio, and 2.5 metres from the side of the halfway house building. The toilet block extends further to both the east and west of the proposed structure and will largely screen the building when viewed from the north. From this direction the most visible part of the building will be the gazebo element and this is open sided allowing views through the southern side further reducing any impact.

The fall of the site from the south to the north is significant and whilst the paved patio base of the proposed halfway house is level and the southern end flush with the adjoining internal roadway, the eastern and northern boundaries are defined by a small capped retaining wall. The overall south-north fall is approximately half a metre. This south-north fall forms part of the wider escarpment of the Chiltern Hills.

The cabin half of the building will provide shelter and security when locked, whilst the open side will allow seating and shelter with easy access. Being on a level base will ensure good accessibility with no steps to negotiate.

The location of the proposed halfway house, on the edge of the course and in an area where groups naturally gather prior to teeing off from the first tee (immediately to the north of the toilet block), is accessible to users without interfering with key views across the course. This area is hard surfaced and has no ecological or landscape value.

Planning Assessment

The two statutory plans that are relevant in the assessment of the application are the Chilterns Management Plan 2019-24, covering the Chiltern Hills AONB of which Chiltern Forest Golf Course forms part, and the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan 2013-33 (VALP), adopted by Buckinghamshire Council in September 2021. Also of relevance is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2023.

In assessing the application against both these plans and the national guidance, it must be borne in mind that the proposed building is not an isolated development but designed to be very much part of the existing developed facilities that support the golf course. As a halfway house it has to be located close to the 9th Green and it is highly desirable that it is located next to the toilet block, where existing services are available.

The Chiltern Hills Management Plan seeks to ensure that new development safeguards the special landscape quality and amenity of the AONB. The following policies are considered to be most relevant:

DP2 -Reject development in the AONB unless it meets listed criteria.

The use is appropriate to its location and gives rise to no harmful ecological or environmental impacts. There would be no light spillage or undue noise caused by the use of the deck – its use is confined to daylight hours when the course is open.

DP4 – Impact on views across the Chilterns and generating traffic and increased activity.

The halfway house would not increase traffic to the site as it caters for users of the golf course, and passing pedestrians using the footpath. The building is not visible to longer views as it is hidden by trees and in a location on the edge of the course.

DP5 – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

A separate LVIA is not considered appropriate for this small scale project however the attached photographs taken from the footpath alongside the paved patio, demonstrate just how low level the visual impact of the deck is on longer views.

DP7 -Design

The approach to the design, already covered in this letter, has led to the new building having a minimal impact on its surroundings. The design adopted is considered appropriate for the location and complementary to the neighbouring toilet block.

DP10 – All schemes produce a net gain to the Chilterns

The work across the golf course to improve biodiversity far outweighs any impact that the building may have.

DP12 – Sympathetic proposals that support the Chilterns as a place to visit.

The new halfway house will enhance facilities for members and visitors to enjoy and offer an opportunity for refreshments for passing walkers using the footpath.

The policies within the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan of particular relevance to this application are set out below. In addition to being within the designated AONB, the site also falls within The Metropolitan Green Belt.

Policy BE2 – Design of New Developments.

The proposal will not interfere with important public views or skylines, and the modest proportions and design of the building will ensure that it integrates well in its setting.

Policy NE3 Chilterns AONB and Setting.

The building will have no adverse impacts on its surroundings or affect the special qualities of the Chiltern Hills.

Policy C4 seeks the protection of Public Rights of Way and the application does not affect the line or use of the adjacent public footpath.

Policy I2, relating to Sports and Recreation, which requires that there is no unacceptable impact on noise and other impacts, the highway network, and to wildlife and habitats. Again the proposal meets all of these criteria without giving rise to any adverse impacts.

Policy S4 accepts appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt, and extensions to buildings that are not significantly larger. The halfway house will enhance the facilities that support the golf course and amount to a very minor increase in the area of the site occupied by buildings.

The relevant part of the NPPF pertinent to the proposal is the guidance relating to the Metropolitan Green Belt, and specifically an assessment against advice within paragraphs 152-154 relating to development within Green Belt land.

A golf course is considered an appropriate use within the Green Belt and there is a general acknowledgement that golf courses (certainly 18-hole club courses) require built facilities that support this use. As I have indicated earlier, Chiltern Forest Golf Club has three developed areas that accommodate facilities that support the course. The main facility is the clubhouse and car park however there is also a maintenance facility (a mixture of buildings and open storage/parking) and a small building housing toilets and adjacent to a hardstanding/patio, close to the 9th green and 1st and 18th tee areas. This latter area is the location of the proposed halfway house. All of these areas are well screened from the wider open space by trees, and the natural contours of the site. As I have stated in my covering letter to the application, the club acknowledges that the course makes an important contribution to the AONB and the Metropolitan Green Belt and contains attractive natural features and diverse habitats.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF sets out exceptions to the general presumption against new building on Green Belt land. The key consideration in para 154 (b) is that appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation must preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

The proposed halfway house does not harm or otherwise affect the openness of the green belt for the following reasons:

1. The halfway house is of modest proportions and with its open sided gazebo feature and timber finish integrates well into contours of the site and will be visually unobtrusive.
2. The building will be set back on an existing hard surfaced base and will not displace green space or interfere with existing trees or wider views.
3. The building has a very small footprint and in the context of the surrounding open space cannot be regarded as disproportionate.
4. The submitted photographs emphasise that the site has no impact on wider views from the course or the open nature of the area.
5. The site is adjacent to the tarmac surfaced footpath/internal roadway and does not form part of the wider open green space of the golf course.

Conclusions

It has been demonstrated that the proposal to erect a halfway house gives rise to no adverse impacts despite the sensitivity of the location, and that the requirements of the relevant planning policies are met. Accordingly it is requested that planning permission be granted.

If the Case Officer or anyone else involved with the case, wishes to discuss the application further, or wishes to arrange access, please contact me on [REDACTED]. I am a member of the club and have been asked by the Co-Chairmen to submit the application.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

Christopher C Walker Dip TP, MRTPI (rtrd).

