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CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

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Dear Sir/ Madam

Worldham Golf Club, Cakers Lane, Worldham, Alton GU34 3BF – Proposal for the erection of floodlights on 1no. Padel Tennis Court

INTRODUCTION

Planning permission has been granted, under reference 32038/012, for three padel tennis courts, together with associated walls and infrastructure (granted 11 April 2023). The courts have been constructed and are in use, and have proven very popular, particularly with coaching of school children and college students. There is demand for after school coaching into the evening, and also for use outside of college hours for students of Alton College which is 10 minutes away. At present, our client cannot presently meet in the winter hours, due to lack of lighting.

This application therefore seeks a variation of condition 2 of permission 32038/012, to allow the use of lighting on one of the courts in the early evening hours. This would involve the addition of four LED lighting masts to the existing court, each sitting at 5m height.

The application is supported by an outdoor lighting report and ecology survey, as described below.

THE SITE

Worldham Golf Club (Unique Property Reference 100062345750; “the Site”) is an 18 hole golf course and driving range, which was built and opened in 1992-1993. It is located in Worldham Parish, to the east of the Alton by-pass, in open countryside.

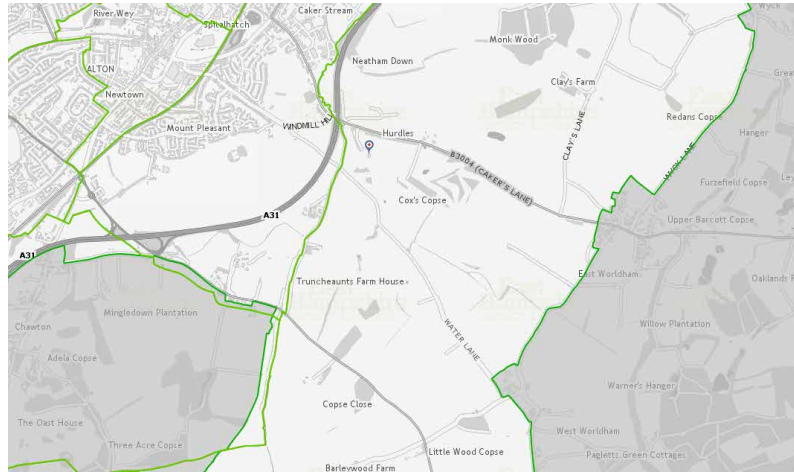


Figure 1 Site Location in relation to South Downs National Park boundary

Access is via Cakers Lane (B3004), with the site being situated 0.9 miles south of Alton Mainline Railway station, and the nearest bus stop (on Bus Route 13/23) being 200m north of the site entrance. From Cakers Lane, there is a private access road of some 140m length.

The Site is not within the South Downs National Park (Figure 1 above).

Planning permission was granted, in April 2023, for the construction of three padel tennis courts at Worldham Golf Club, to supplement the existing sports and leisure offering. Padel Tennis is a racket sport played on an enclosed court, which is approximately 1/3 of the size of a standard tennis court. The sport is rapidly growing in popularity, and is described as being a mixture of tennis and squash, with the ball allowed to bounce on the turf and also on the walls surrounding the court when in play. It is a particularly accessible form of racket sport due to the techniques involved, which many players find similar to table tennis.

The courts are located to the south-east of the putting green, club house building and car park, as shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 Location of 3no approved padel tennis courts



The courts have now been constructed, and have been in use for the past few months. Figure 3 below shows the courts as viewed from the far side of the putting green (looking south east towards the nearside court)



Figure 3 Padel Tennis Courts at Worldham Golf Club

THE PROPOSAL

As explained in the previous application, it was not proposed to introduce any artificial lighting at that time, and so a condition was imposed upon the permission to ensure that any future use of artificial lighting be first approved by the Local Planning Authority; this application seeks such approval.

- 2 **No external lighting/ floodlighting shall be installed on the site without the prior agreement of the Local Planning Authority.**
Reason - In the interests of the amenity of the occupants of neighbouring properties and the character of the rural area, and to ensure that protected species are not adversely affected.

Now that the courts are operational, it is clear that there is significant demand in the local area for coaching and practice sessions; in particular, local schools have indicated a desire for the courts to be available after school. Padel tennis offers an accessible route into sport which offers significant health and well-being benefits, being played socially as a group, in the outdoors. The introduction of floodlights on one of the existing courts would allow the coach to extend the coaching hours available, for those who work or attend school during the day.



SITE PLANNING HISTORY

The Site has been in use for a golf club business since 1992-3, and is therefore believed to have fallen within former Use Class D2 (Outdoor Sports and Recreation). Class D was revoked from 1 September 2020, and replaced with (of relevance here) Use Class F2(c) – “Areas or places for outdoor sport or recreation (not involving motorised vehicles or firearms).”

Relevant planning history is as follows:

32038/003 – Change of use from farmland to a 9-hole golf course extension (Granted 22 March 1994)

32038/004 – Two storey extension to club house and driving range shelter (Granted 4 Oct 1996)

32038/005 – Extension to Golf Course (Granted 24 Feb 1998)

32038/006 – Two storey extension to existing club house (Granted 26 Oct 1998)

32038/008 – Erection of flagpole with flag (Granted 8 Oct 1999)

32038/009 – New mixed use B1c and B8 building (Granted 20 Jan 2015)

32038/010 – Installation of 18 x ground mounted BERM flood lights and 3 x flood lights mounted at 5m high on tee stalls (Withdrawn, 2018)

32038/012 – Three Padel tennis courts

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

There is no Neighbourhood Plan in force in this area. The relevant Development Plan against which this application is to be assessed includes the Joint Core Strategy (Adopted 8 May 2014) and Saved policies of the ‘Local Plan second review’ (Adopted March 2006). The emerging plan has not yet reached a stage where its policies carry weight in decision making.

Economic Development and Tourism

It is important that the economic impact of development is taken into account when determining development proposals (as recognised at para 5.6 of the Core Strategy). Economic development has a key role to play in the achievement of sustainable development, with sustainable economies in the countryside, as well as towns, assisting with creation of a balanced economy (para 5.1).

On that basis, Policy CP6 of the Joint Core Strategy supports reasonable extension of existing firms in the countryside. Paragraph 5.29 recognises that businesses in the rural parts of the district make an important contribution to the overall economic success of the district.

Policy CP9 supports new tourism facilities and visitor attractions in the countryside through re-use of sustainable rural buildings or as part of rural business diversification. The present proposal does involve a new facility, nor does it involve re-use of buildings – but the support offered in Policy CP9 for tourism/visitor attractions in the countryside is to be noted. Paragraph 5.55 advises that tourism development in the countryside should be small scale and reflect the sensitivity of the location – which this proposal is and does.

In addition to Development Plan policy, outlined above, there is support in the NPPF (a material consideration) for development which supports economic growth and productivity, taking into account local business needs (Para 85 NPPF).



Para 88 of the NPPF states that “Planning...decisions should enable:

“the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas”

“the development and diversification of...land-based rural businesses” and

“Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.”

“the retention and development of accessible local services...such as....sports venues..”

Social Infrastructure/ Sport and Leisure Facilities

The Joint Core Strategy seeks to protect existing, and support new leisure, sport and recreation facilities, which are an important resource for the health and wellbeing of the community and encouraging healthy lifestyles (Policy CP16).

The policy (CP16) makes reference to the ‘needs’ of the district for such facilities. There is a need for enhanced access to sport and leisure facilities to tackle high rates of obesity and physical inactivity. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JDNA) provides evidence on current and future health and wellbeing needs and inequalities in the Hampshire population. The East Hampshire Welfare and Wellbeing Strategy (2020-2024) also seeks to improve the Welfare and Wellbeing of residents across East Hampshire. The latter confirms that provision of environments where people can be active is one important way that the Council can influence health and wellbeing. This is a priority in Hampshire, with 65% of adults being overweight or obese in the district and high levels of physical inactivity in several wards (including two wards in nearby Alton).

Saved Policy HC3 also supports the expansion of existing leisure and sports facilities in the countryside, so long as the development is ancillary to an existing use, and will not lead to unsustainable travel patterns. The proposal does not require change of use of the land upon which it is to be built – it is already a site with lawful use for outdoor sports. As such, the proposal is not ‘expanding’ sports facilities into the countryside as contemplated by Policy HC3. Rather, the proposal involves additional infrastructure (lighting) which will allow more use of the existing facility.

Saved Policy R1 confirms support or provision of outdoor sport and recreation in the countryside (subject to a number of conditions, which are met in this case). The supporting text to Saved Policy R1 also recognises that adequate provision of recreational facilities is “particularly important to encourage participation in sport and information recreational activity” (para 7.51).

Therefore, the proposal is supported by Policy CP16 (as infrastructure associated with a new leisure facility); and Saved Policy R1 (support for outdoor sport and recreation in the countryside).

Landscape Character and Visual Impact

Policy CP20 sets out the applicable landscape policy, which seeks to conserve and enhance the special characteristics of the district’s natural environment. The Site is on the boundary between the ‘Wealden Greensands’ and ‘Hampshire Downs’ Countryside Character Area, as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment.



Having been in use as a golf course for some 20 years, the landscape is highly managed with mature trees and frequently mown fairways.

This application proposes artificial lighting for one of the three padel tennis courts; given the limited scale of the proposal, it is expected that the effect on landscape character / visual amenity is likely to be very localised, and of low impact.

A Lighting Survey and Report has been submitted with the application, and reviewed by the ecologist in preparation of their assessment.

Biodiversity

Policy CP21 of the Joint Core Strategy requires that development maintains, enhances and protects the district's biodiversity. Wildlife enhancements should be incorporated into the design to achieve a net gain in biodiversity and ensure adverse effects are avoided, mitigation or compensated for.

The Site is part of the Golf Course environment at present, and is therefore highly managed and of limited biodiversity, with grass regularly mown. It is beyond the buffer zones around the nearest SPAs and SACs and is not in close proximity to any SSSI (the nearest being Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers SSSI, over 2km to the east at East Worldham).

An ecology assessment is submitted with the application. In conclusion, the report predicts no significant impacts on any commuting or foraging habitat or on any bat roosts. There is only one tree within the zone of influence of the lighting, which has potential roost features; the report concludes there will be no significant impact based on the proposed illumination levels not exceeding 0.21 lux (with 0.4 being the limit at which the ILP Guidance note for bats and artificial lighting considers 'complete darkness').



Summary and Conclusion

Planning permission is sought for installation of floodlights on one of the existing approved padel tennis courts at Worldham Golf Club, near Alton. The Site has lawful use for Outdoor Sport, and is located within the countryside. The golf course is a highly managed environment/ landscape. Given the limited scale of the proposal any effect on landscape character / visual amenity is likely to be very localised, and of low impact. The lighting impacts have been assessed and no significant impact on bat roosting or commuting is predicted.

This proposal supports the economic diversification of an established business within the district, and supports the economic objective of 'sustainable development' (to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy). It also supports the social objective of sustainable development, in that it supports the ability of the community to boost their physical activity, health and wellbeing. The natural environment will not be adversely affected, and therefore the proposal also supports the environmental objective of sustainable development.

Permission should therefore be granted for this proposal for sustainable development.

BELL CORNWELL LLP

