

28 SEPTEMBER 2021 PLANNING COMMITTEE

6B PLAN/2020/0841

WARD: MH

LOCATION: Hoebridge Golf Centre, Old Woking Road, Woking, Surrey, GU22 8JH

PROPOSAL: Extension to existing car park, resurfacing of existing car park and associated works.

APPLICANT: Mr S. Percy

OFFICER: David Raper

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE:

The proposal has been referred to Planning Committee by Councillor Johnson.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is for the extension of the existing car park at the Hoebridge Golf Centre to provide 48x additional parking spaces and associated engineering works. The proposal also includes the resurfacing of an existing gravel overflow car park with tarmac.

PLANNING STATUS

- Green Belt
- Escarpment and Rising Ground of Landscape Importance
- Adjacent to Area of High Archaeological Potential (part of site)
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA ZoneB (400m-5km)

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE planning permission.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Hoebridge Golf Centre comprises three golf courses, a driving range, adventure golf course and clubhouse building. The Golf Centre benefits from a large tarmac car park extending for approximately 137m in length and 40m in width with an additional gravel overflow car park of approximately 30m in length and 16m in width providing a total of approximately 224x parking spaces. The Golf Centre sits on a prominent piece of rising ground which forms part of a designated Escarpment. The proposal site is in designated Green Belt.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None of relevance.

CONSULTATIONS

- **County Highway Authority:** No objection subject to conditions.
- **Drainage and Flood Risk Engineer:** No objection subject to conditions.
- **Tree Officer:** Full arboricultural information required.

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- **County Archaeologist:** *“Despite the proximity of the area of high archaeological potential, an archaeological response is not justified in this instance should this proposal be permitted, and no further action is therefore required as regards the buried archaeological heritage”*

REPRESENTATIONS

None received.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021):

Section 2 - Achieving sustainable development

Section 12 - Achieving well-designed places

Section 13 - Protecting Green Belt land

Section 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Woking Core Strategy (2012):

CS1 - A spatial strategy for Woking Borough

CS6 - Green Belt

CS7 - Biodiversity and nature conservation

CS17 - Open space, green infrastructure, sport and recreation

CS18 - Transport and accessibility

CS20 - Heritage and conservation

CS21 - Design

CS24 - Woking's Landscape and Townscape

CS25 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

Woking Development Management Policies DPD (2016):

DM2 - Trees and Landscaping

DM3 - Outdoor Recreation and Sport

DM13 - Buildings Within and Adjoining the Green Belt

DM20 - Heritage assets and their settings

Supplementary Planning Documents:

Parking Standards (2018)

Design (2015)

PLANNING ISSUES

Impact on Green Belt:

1. The proposal site is in designated Green Belt and as such Woking Core Strategy (2012) policy CS6 'Green Belt', DMP DPD (2016) policy DM13 'Buildings Within and Adjoining the Green Belt' and section 13 of the NPPF (2021) apply and these policies seek to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. The NPPF (2021) states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Paragraph 138 of the NPPF (2021) sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt:
 - a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

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- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
2. The NPPF (2021) establishes that the erection of new buildings in the Green Belt is 'inappropriate development' with a limited number of exceptions including "*the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation...as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it*". The applicant suggests that the car park extension should be considered under this exception however the provision of a car park is not in itself considered to constitute appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.
 3. The NPPF goes on to say that certain other forms of development, including engineering operations, are also not inappropriate development, provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
 4. The NPPF (2021) states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in 'Very Special Circumstances'.
 5. The proposal relates to a banked piece of land adjacent to the existing car park. The proposal is to extend the car park which would involve engineering operations to build up the ground level and create new areas of banked earth. The extended car park would comprise 48x parking spaces and is identified as comprising a 'TechPave' interlocking grid system infilled with aggregate. The existing naturally sloped and grassed bank would be replaced with an extended car park which is considered to result in an engineered and artificial appearance and is considered to have a detrimental impact on openness due to the urbanising appearance of the development in comparison to the existing situation. In this regard the proposal is considered to conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt set out in Paragraph 138 of the NPPF (2021) and results in encroachment and sprawl of development into the Green Belt.
 6. In Turner v SSCLG [2016] EWCA Civ 466 it was established that the concept of 'openness' is capable of having both a spatial and visual dimension and that the decision maker should consider how the visual effect of the development would bear on whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Furthermore, current Planning Practice Guidance sets out what factors can be taken into account when considering the impact on openness and includes "*the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation*" and states that "*openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects*" (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722 Revision date: 22.07. 2019).
 7. Whilst the additional hardstanding itself would have no volume and therefore no spatial impact on the openness of the Green Belt, the visual impact is a consideration. The extended area of hardstanding would be a visually detracting feature and the use of the car park would result in vehicles being parked on the land which themselves would add a degree of above-ground height and volume on the proposal site, albeit transient in nature. The proposal would also attract additional activity in the form of pedestrian and vehicle movements which are currently confined to the existing car parking area. The proposal site is already served by a very large car park extending from north to south measuring approximately 137m in length and 40m in width and the proposal would result in even further development in the form of hardstanding and engineering operations which would encroach into currently undeveloped land in the

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Green Belt. Furthermore, the proposal site is in an elevated and very prominent position and is clearly visible from the surrounding area which further adds to the harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

8. The submitted plans identify the use of aggregate set into an interlocking grid system as well as soft landscaping and tree planting around the new area of parking. These features are considered to assist in mitigating the harm to the openness of the Green Belt however these do not outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt. Whether a development is visible from public vantage points is not relevant in considering the impact on the Green Belt. The resurfacing of the existing overflow car park with tarmac is not considered to materially impact on the openness of the Green Belt and this element of the proposal is considered acceptable.

Very Special Circumstances:

9. The NPPF (2021) states that:

“Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances...When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”

10. The applicant has put forward several arguments in support of the proposal which have been considered in turn below.
 - *The proposed car park is of limited size, located close to existing buildings, would be well screened from public view by topography and landscaping and would be surfaced in ‘grasscrete’*
11. Whilst these features may assist in mitigating the harm to the openness of the Green Belt, they do not in themselves constitute VSC which would outweigh the harm caused.
 - *The site is reliant on private car use and there is an express need for additional parking facilities on site in order to provide for the increase in custom to reduce the stress on the highway. The lack of parking is also placing stress upon the highways causing congestion and traffic issues due to the high demand for the facilities of the application site.*
12. Whilst the existing car park appears to be well used, there is no evidence that there is a severe lack of parking which is causing significant congestion or highway safety issues. The site is already served by a large amount of car parking (approximately 224x spaces) and is served by a long access drive and dedicated right-turn lane on Old Woking Road.
 - *The use of the site contributes to the betterment of public health through the provision of exercise and recreational facilities. The use of the site helps to contribute towards the Government’s overall objective of improving public health.*
13. The site is an established Golf Course which provides a facility for outdoor sport and recreation. The site would continue to exist and operate without the additional parking

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and refusal of the proposed additional parking is not considered to materially harm the site's operation as an outdoor sport and recreation facility.

- *Both National and Local Planning policy is supportive of business development regardless of the location. The proposed car park is necessary as, without it, due to the limitations of parking, bookings for use of the site will be limited meaning less income for the business which, in turn places stress on existing jobs. The lack of parking is most likely to affect 'pirate golf' a local attraction for young families within the local area.*
14. The needs of private business is not considered to override the need to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Preserving the openness of the Green Belt has more wide-ranging holistic public benefits than the needs of a private business. The NPPF (2021) makes clear that 'substantial weight' must be given to any harm to the Green Belt when considering planning applications.
 15. None of the above arguments, either alone or in combination, are considered to amount to Very Special Circumstances which would clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt by reason of the proposal's inappropriateness and harm to openness.
 16. The proposed development, by reason of the increase in the amount of parking and hardstanding and the associated engineering operations, represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt which would be harmful by definition and would have a harmful impact on the openness of the Green Belt. No Very Special Circumstances are considered to exist which would clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt reason of the proposal's inappropriateness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Woking Core Strategy (2012) policy CS6 'Green Belt', Woking Development Management Policies DPD (2016) policy DM13 'Buildings Within and Adjoining the Green Belt' and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

Impact on Character:

17. The proposal site is positioned on an area of high ground which is prominent in the landscape and forms part of an 'Escarpment of Rising Ground of Landscape Importance' as designated by the Woking Core Strategy (2012). Policy CS24 'Woking's landscape and townscape' states that "*All development proposals will provide a positive benefit in terms of landscape and townscape character, and local distinctiveness and will have regard to landscape character areas*" and states that;

"To protect local landscape and townscape character, development will be expected to...conserve, and where possible enhance existing character, especially key landscapes such as heathlands, escarpments and the canal/river network and settlement characteristics; maintain locally valued features, and enhance or restore deteriorating features..."
18. The proposal site currently comprises a grassed earth bank between the existing car park and the golf course on lower ground. The site currently has a natural appearance whereas the proposal would result in an extension of the car park and associated hardstanding which is considered to harm the naturalistic appearance of the Escarpment. Whilst the edges of the proposed car park extension are identified as comprising earth banks with landscaping, the proposal would extend the car park and increase the level of hardstanding and is considered to have an overly engineered appearance which is at-odds with the naturalistic, informal character of the Escarpment.

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Transportation Impact:

19. The proposal would result in 48x additional parking spaces. The County Highway Authority has been consulted and raises no objection on highway safety or capacity grounds. The Council's Climate Change (2013) SPD requires a minimum of 5% 'active' Electric Vehicle charging points and 10% 'passive' points; this could be secured by condition if the proposal were considered otherwise acceptable. Overall the proposal is considered to have an acceptable transportation impact.

Impact on Trees:

20. Trees and vegetation have been removed from the proposal site however there is a belt of mature trees to the south of the proposed car park extension, although these are not protected trees. The Council's Tree Officer has been consulted and has requested full arboricultural information detailing how the trees would be protected during construction. This information could be secured by condition if the proposal were considered otherwise acceptable.

Drainage and Flood Risk:

21. The Council's Drainage and Flood Risk Engineer has been consulted and raises no objection subject to a condition requiring details of a sustainable drainage system. Such details could be secured by condition if the proposal were considered otherwise acceptable.

Impact on Archaeology:

22. Part of the proposal site is adjacent to an Area of High Archaeological Potential. The County Archaeologist has been consulted and raises no objection and has confirmed that no investigation work is necessary. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in this regard.

Impact on Neighbours:

23. There are no residential neighbours in close proximity to the proposed development and the proposal is not considered to result in an undue impact on neighbouring amenity.

CONCLUSION

24. The proposed development, by reason of the increase in the amount of parking and hardstanding and the associated engineering operations, represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt which would be harmful by definition and would have a harmful impact on the openness of the Green Belt. No Very Special Circumstances are considered to exist which would clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt reason of the proposal's inappropriateness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Woking Core Strategy (2012) policy CS6 'Green Belt', Woking Development Management Policies DPD (2016) policy DM13 'Buildings Within and Adjoining the Green Belt' and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).
25. The proposed development, by reason of the increase in the amount of parking and hardstanding and the associated engineering operations, would result in a harmful

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visual impact on the Escarpment and Rising Ground of Landscape Importance and the visual amenities of the surrounding area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Woking Core Strategy (2012) policies CS21 'Design' and CS24 'Woking's Landscape and Townscape', Supplementary Planning Document 'Design' (2015) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

26. The proposal is therefore recommended for refusal.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Site visit photographs
2. Consultation responses
3. Site Notices

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE planning permission for the following reasons:

01. The proposed development, by reason of the increase in the amount of parking and hardstanding and the associated engineering operations, represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt which would be harmful by definition and would have a harmful impact on the openness of the Green Belt. No Very Special Circumstances are considered to exist which would clearly outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt reason of the proposal's inappropriateness. The proposal is therefore contrary to Woking Core Strategy (2012) policy CS6 'Green Belt', Woking Development Management Policies DPD (2016) policy DM13 'Buildings Within and Adjoining the Green Belt' and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).
02. The proposed development, by reason of the increase in the amount of parking and hardstanding and the associated engineering operations, would result in a harmful visual impact on the Escarpment and Rising Ground of Landscape Importance and the visual amenities of the surrounding area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Woking Core Strategy (2012) policies CS21 'Design' and CS24 'Woking's Landscape and Townscape', Supplementary Planning Document 'Design' (2015) and the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

Informatives

1. The plans and documents relating to the development hereby refused are listed below:

S1495-001 B (Location Plan) received by the LPA on 21.12.2020
EX101 A (Existing Site Survey) received by the LPA on 29.09.2020
PL03 A (Existing Overflow Car Park) received by the LPA on 29.09.2020
PL101 B (Site Plan Proposed) received by the LPA on 26.08.2021
PL102 C (Car Park Layout Proposed) received by the LPA on 21.12.2020
PL111 B (Typical Section Proposed) received by the LPA on 26.08.2021
PL112 A (Elevation B-B) received by the LPA on 21.12.2020
PL113 A (Elevation A-A) received by the LPA on 21.12.2020
Supplementary Supporting Statement received by the LPA on 26.08.2021