

5.2 - SE/13/01616/FUL Date expired 29 August 2013

PROPOSAL: Change of use from grazing land to practice facilities for The Knole Park Golf Club, to include practice tee, fairway bunker, practice putting and chipping green.

LOCATION: Knole Park Golf Club, Knole Park Golf Club, Seal Hollow Road, Sevenoaks TN15 0HJ

WARD(S): Sevenoaks Eastern

ITEM FOR DECISION

This application has been referred to Development Control Committee at the discretion of the Chief Planning Officer in view of its controversial nature.

RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-

1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

In pursuance of section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2) The landscaping scheme as shown on drawing KPGC-p-203 and detailed in section 7.2-7.23 of the submitted Habitat Survey and Management Strategy (including Figure 2) shall be implemented prior to the use hereby permitted be carried out, unless as otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

To safeguard the visual appearance of the area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

3) If within a period of five years from the completion of the development, any of the trees or plants that form part of the approved details of soft landscaping die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased then they shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.

To safeguard the visual appearance of the area as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

4) No external lighting shall be installed on the land at any time.

To protect the openness of the Green Belt and the character of the landscape as supported by Policies EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

5) No machinery to be used in the maintenance of the practise area or driving range or to collect golf balls shall be used between the hours of 1900 and 0800 the following day.

To protect the living conditions which the occupiers of near by dwellings can expect to enjoy, as supported by Policy EN1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

6) The practice area and driving range shall only be used by members of the Knole Park Golf Club and not for any other commercial purposes.

In the interests of highways safety and vehicle parking, as supported by Policy VH1 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

7) The works hereby permitted shall be carried out outside the core breeding period for birds (March to August inclusive) as recommended by para 5.5.2 of the submitted Habitat Survey and Management Strategy. As recommended, should this timeframe be unobtainable, a thorough search for the presence of breeding birds should be conducted by a suitably experienced ecologist prior to the start of works. Should evidence of breeding birds be recorded, works within 5m of the nest, or works that has potential to destroy the nest, should stop until the eggs have hatched and the chicks fledged, or the nest is deemed by a suitably experienced ecologist to have been abandoned.

In the interests of conserving the biodiversity of the site.

8) The ecological enhancements detailed in section 7.2-7.23 of the submitted Habitat Survey and Management Strategy (including Figure 2) shall be implemented prior to the use hereby permitted be carried out.

In the interests of conserving the biodiversity of the site.

9) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: KPGC-p-201/202/203/204

For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

10) No development shall be carried out on the land until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a "watching brief". This shall be undertaken by an archaeologist approved in writing by the Council so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds are recorded. The watching brief shall be in accordance with a written specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Council.

To investigate and record archaeological features as supported by Policy EN25A of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan.

In determining this application, the Local Planning Authority has had regard to the following Development Plan Policies:

Sevenoaks District Local Plan - Policies EN1, VP1

Sevenoaks District Core Strategy 2011 - Policies SP1, SP11, L08.

The following is a summary of the main reasons for the decision:

Any potentially significant impacts on the amenities of nearby dwellings can be satisfactorily mitigated by way of the conditions imposed.

Any potentially significant impacts on the biodiversity of the site can be satisfactorily mitigated by way of the conditions imposed.

The development will not have a detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the site.

The proposed use is considered to be appropriate within the Green Belt.

Informatives

1) The granting of planning permission confers no other permission or consent on the applicant. It is therefore important to advise the applicant that no works can be undertaken on a Public Right of Way without the express consent of the Highways Authority. In cases of doubt the applicant should be advised to contact this office before commencing any works that may affect the Public Right of Way.

Should any temporary closures be required to ensure public safety then this office will deal on the basis that:

- The applicant pays for the administration costs
- The duration of the closure is kept to a minimum
- Alternative routes will be provided for the duration of the closure.
- A minimum of six weeks notice is required to process any applications for temporary closures.

This means that the Public Right of Way must not be stopped up, diverted, obstructed (this includes any building materials, constructor's vehicles or waste generated during any of the construction phases) or the surface disturbed.

There must be no encroachment on the current width, at any time now or in future and no furniture or fixtures may be erected on or across Public Rights of Way without consent. It is suggested that any planting is done at least one metre back from the footpath boundary so there is room for plants to be kept trimmed back.

It should be noted that the public using the footpath on foot have the priority over any vehicular traffic using the rights of way under their private rights as agents of the landowner. Therefore signage needs to warn drivers of their need to give way to and be aware that the public are using the path as pedestrians, rather than pedestrians having to be aware of vehicles and give way to them.

Note to Applicant

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals. SDC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner, by;

- Offering a duty officer service to provide initial planning advice,
- Providing a pre-application advice service,
- When appropriate, updating applicants/agents of any small scale issues that may arise in the processing of their application,
- Where possible and appropriate suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome,
- Allowing applicants to keep up to date with their application and viewing all

consultees comments on line
(www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/environment/planning/planning_services_online/654.asp),

- By providing a regular forum for planning agents,
- Working in line with the NPPF to encourage developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area,
- Providing easy on line access to planning policies and guidance, and
- Encouraging them to seek professional advice whenever appropriate.

In this instance the applicant/agent:

- 1) Was provided with pre-application advice.
- 2) Did not require any further assistance as the application was acceptable as submitted.
- 3) The application was dealt with/approved without delay.

Proposal

- 1 Change of use from grazing land to practice facilities for The Knole Park Golf Club, to include practice tee, fairway bunker, practice putting and chipping green.

Relevant Planning History

- 2 00/00491/FUL Single storey extension to side of clubhouse. Granted.

02/00120/FUL Single storey extension to rear of clubhouse, including removal of 3 no. existing timber sheds. Granted.

05/00380/FUL New practice area for golf course incorporating tees, bunkers, greens and driving range area. Refused

05/00449/FUL Construct two galvanised steel water tanks and pump house in greenkeepers compound, as amended by letter dated 14/04/05 and enclosed plan. Granted.

SE/12/01844/FUL Change of Use: - Currently Knole Park Golf Club has, under permitted development, the use of the land for 28 days a year as additional car parking. The request is for this to be extended to 365 days a year. The area in question is fenced from the field on three sides. Granted

Policies

Sevenoaks District Local Plan

- 3 Policies - EN1, VP1

Sevenoaks Core Strategy

- 4 Policies - SP1, L08, SP11

Other

5 National Planning Policy Framework

Constraints

6 Green Belt

Sevenoaks Town Council

7 Sevenoaks Town Council recommended approval.

Representations

8 24 letters of objection have been received, which are summarised as follows:

- Our view and rural aspect will be lost
- We would be opposed to any netting
- The proposal is very similar to that previously refused in 2005
- The proposal would detract from the landscape
- The proposal would be harmful to wildlife
- The application seems to be a cynical attempt to prepare the site for future residential development
- The land is agricultural and until recently was producing an excellent crop
- The proposal will lead to an unacceptable increase in traffic.
- The development will be of no benefit to the wider community
- I have concern regarding the safety of the footpath users.
- The development will have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring residents in terms of noise
- Will this set a precedent for similar applications for changes of use to private sport development?
- A lighting scheme will surely be forthcoming, which will cause serious light pollution.
- No attempt has been made to address the drainage issues with the land.

9 2 letters of support have also been received, which are summarised as follows:

- We do not object to the proposals subject to adequate conditions relating to the facility being solely for the use of existing members, the public footpath is safe and every effort is made to conserve wildlife.
- The proposal should be considered in the wider context of securing the future of the Golf Club, with the wider economical, social and environmental benefits that will bring to Sevenoaks residents.

Consultations

KCC Ecology

- 10 Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application. We have the following response to make:

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”. In order to comply with this ‘Biodiversity Duty’, planning decisions must ensure that they adequately consider the potential ecological impacts of a proposed development.

- 11 *The National Planning Policy Framework states that “the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...minimising impacts on biodiversity and delivering net gains in biodiversity where possible.”*
- 12 *Paragraph 99 of Government Circular (ODPM 06/2005) Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations & Their Impact Within the Planning System states that ‘It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision.’*
- 13 *Natural England has published Standing Advice on protected species and Ancient Woodland. When determining an application for development that is covered by the Standing Advice, Local Planning Authorities must take into account the Standing Advice. The Standing Advice is a material consideration in the determination of applications in the same way as a letter received from Natural England following consultation.*
- 14 *The Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Management Strategy has been submitted in support of this application. We are satisfied that the assessment of potential for ecological impacts has been carried out to an appropriate standard. The report concludes that the site has little ecological value, and that there is limited potential for impacts to protected species.*
- 15 *Skylarks were recorded on site during the survey. These birds are included in the section 41 list (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) as ‘species of principle importance’. Sevenoaks DC needs therefore to give particular consideration to the provision within the planning application to ensure that they are given an appropriate degree of regard.*
- 16 *Section 5.5.2 - 5.5.3 provide a method to ensure that impacts to nesting birds are avoided. We advise that this must be implemented.*
- 17 *The report provides a framework for ‘ecological enhancements’ (section 7). We advise that the enhancement measures are secured by condition to ensure that they are implemented. In particular the provision of skylark habitat (7.20) is essential to ensure that there is continued availability of habitat on the site post-development.*

Natural England

- 18 *Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 05 June 2013 which was received by Natural England on 10 June 2013.*

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)

The National Park and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

- 19 *Natural England's comments in relation to this application are provided in the following sections. Statutory nature conservation sites - no objection*

This application is in close proximity to the Knole Park Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

- 20 *Natural England is satisfied that the proposed development being carried out in strict accordance with the details of the application, as submitted, will not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified. We therefore advise your authority that this SSSI does not represent a constraint in determining this application. Should the details of this application change, Natural England draws your attention to Section 28(l) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), requiring your authority to re-consult Natural England.*

- 21 *Protected landscapes - no comments*

This application is within the setting of the Kent Downs AONB. Natural England has no comments to make on this proposal as we do not believe that this development is likely to adversely affect the purpose of the Kent Downs AONB. Given the location of the development, however, the local planning authority should seek the views of the AONB Unit where relevant, prior to determining this planning application, as they may have comments to make on the location, nature or design of this development.

- 22 *Protected species*

It is noted that a survey for European Protected Species has been undertaken in support of this proposal. Natural England does not object to the proposed development. On the basis of the information available to us, our advice is that the proposed development would be unlikely to affect any European Protected Species.

For clarity, this advice is based on the information currently available to us and is subject to any material changes in circumstances, including changes to the proposals or further information on the impacts to protected species.

We have not assessed the survey for badgers, barn owls and breeding birds¹, water voles, white-clawed crayfish or widespread reptiles. These are all species protected by domestic legislation and you should use our protected species

standing advice to assess the adequacy of any surveys, the impacts that may result and the appropriateness of any mitigation measures.

23 Local wildlife sites

If the proposal site is on or adjacent to a local wildlife site, eg Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) or Local Nature Reserve (LNR) the authority should ensure it has sufficient information to fully understand the impact of the proposal on the local wildlife site, and the importance of this in relation to development plan policies, before it determines the application.

24 Biodiversity enhancements

This application may provide opportunities to incorporate features into the design which are beneficial to wildlife, such as the incorporation of roosting opportunities for bats or the installation of bird nest boxes. The authority should consider securing measures to enhance the biodiversity of the site from the applicant, if it is minded to grant permission for this application. This is in accordance with Paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Additionally, we would draw your attention to Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) which states that 'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. Section 40(3) of the same Act also states that 'conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'.

25 Landscape enhancements

This application may provide opportunities to enhance the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding natural and built environment; use natural resources more sustainably; and bring benefits for the local community, for example through green space provision and access to and contact with nature. Landscape characterisation and townscape assessments, and associated sensitivity and capacity assessments provide tools for planners and developers to consider new development and ensure that it makes a positive contribution in terms of design, form and location, to the character and functions of the landscape and avoids any unacceptable impacts.

26 *We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.*

KCC Public Rights Of Way

27 *Thank you for your letter dated 10th June 2013 with regard to the above Application*

Public Rights of Way Footpath SU17 runs along the eastern and southern boundaries of the site. I do not anticipate that it will be directly affected by the development. I enclose a copy of the Public Rights of Way network map showing the line of this path for your information.

28 *Contractors' vehicles must not be parked on the section of the path that runs along the access road obstructing the right of way. Signage should be erected to make contractors aware that this is a public footpath along which pedestrians have the*

right of way and that speed should be limited. Any damage to the surface of the footpath caused by contractors' vehicles or works must be repaired at the expense of the applicant.

29 *It is noted that the direction of play from the practice tee, fairway bunker and practice putting and chipping green is away from the east-west section of the footpath. However, the practice driving area will result in play parallel to the southwest to northeast section of the footpath, with the possibility of balls landing on the path from poor hitting. The information provided by the applicant states that the present practice area is barely 100m from the 2nd tee.*

How much room is there between this new practice area and the footpath? Will high netting be necessary to protect the safety of pedestrians using this part of the footpath?

30 *The granting of planning permission confers no other permission or consent on the applicant. It is therefore important to advise the applicant that no works can be undertaken on a Public Right of Way without the express consent of the Highways Authority. In cases of doubt the applicant should be advised to contact this office before commencing any works that may affect the Public Right of Way.*

31 *Should any temporary closures be required to ensure public safety then this office will deal on the basis that:*

- *The applicant pays for the administration costs*
- *The duration of the closure is kept to a minimum*
- *Alternative routes will be provided for the duration of the closure.*
- *A minimum of six weeks notice is required to process any applications for temporary closures.*

32 *This means that the Public Right of Way must not be stopped up, diverted, obstructed (this includes any building materials, constructor's vehicles or waste generated during any of the construction phases) or the surface disturbed.*

33 *There must be no encroachment on the current width, at any time now or in future and no furniture or fixtures may be erected on or across Public Rights of Way without consent. It is suggested that any planting is done at least one metre back from the footpath boundary so there is room for plants to be kept trimmed back.*

34 *In response to the questions raised by the KCC PROW Officer above regarding signage and the alignment of the practice ground, the applicant responded by clarifying that no netting will be required due to the generous distances to the footpath and adequate signage will be put up during construction works.*

Rural Planning Ltd

35 *I refer to your letter of 10 June 2013 requesting advice on the planning application submitted for a change of use from grazing land to golf practice facilities including practice tee, fairway bunker, practice putting and chipping green, at the above location.*

36 *As you will be aware there was an earlier unsuccessful application for a new practice area on this land submitted under SE/05/00380/FUL. As far as the issue*

of loss of agricultural land is concerned, I advised (copy letter dated 13 July 2005 attached) that the soil study undertaken at that time indicated the land to be outside the definition of "best and most versatile", so it would not warrant special consideration in terms of the impact on agricultural potential, although of course there may be other issues to consider outside my own remit.

37 *I hope this is of assistance but please let me know if you require any further advice.*

Tree Officer

38 *Having visited the site and spoken to the treasurer. It is my understanding that the main amount of work to facilitate the proposed practice facilities, is to move the high areas of the land, which are approximately centrally located, to the lower areas, which are approximately nearer to the car park.*

39 *Any visual harm will be during the proposed works but, I suspect will be short lived as the proposed landscaping matures.*

40 *My only concern with this proposal is that the proposed time scales are to carry out the works more or less as soon as consent has been granted (should this be the case). This is to ensure that there is enough of the current growing season to ensure that the grass grows. Failure to do this would leave the area unusable. I have noted within the Habitat Survey, paragraph 4.4.2, that Skylarks were present during the survey. I also noted the presence of Skylarks, which are ground nesting birds. The proposed works would disturb these birds during the nesting season. This as I understand it is in contravention of the Countryside and Wildlife Act 1981. Both of the aforementioned issues are time sensitive but I suggest that the nesting bird issue is of greater importance than the need to ensure seed planting prior to the end of the growing season. This may mean that the proposal will not be able to begin until the beginning of the growing season 2014.*

KCC Highways

41 *Thank you for inviting me to comment on this application. I note that the proposals are additional facilities for members only, not open for general public use. I also note that there were no highway or transportation reasons for refusal to the previous application.*

42 *I write to confirm on behalf of the Highway Authority that I have objection to these proposals. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

Chief Planning Officer's Appraisal

Site Description

43 *Knole Park Golf Club is situated just outside the edge of Sevenoaks Town Centre, within the Metropolitan Green Belt, in the north-west corner of Knole Park.*

44 *The Golf Club itself is located within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but the grazing land which this application relates to is sited outside the AONB.*

Description of Proposal

- 45 It is proposed to change the use of a part of the open grazing land directly to the north of the Golf Club buildings and car park into a practice area.
- 46 The practice area will involve the creation of a practice tee and practice ground, along with a practice putting green and chipping green.
- 47 The teeing ground will measure approx. 400m² in total, a length of approx. 300m and overall width of 140m. This area will be mown at approx. 250-30mm, surrounded by 'semi rough' of 50-70mm and an area of wild seed mix.
- 48 The practice putting green will measure approx. 450m² and the chipping green slightly larger.
- 49 The facility is intended to replace the inadequate current teeing ground (which is not large enough and are described as not fit for purpose) and will provide for the current Golf Club Members.
- 50 It should be noted that an application on the same site was refused in 2005 (05/00380/FUL). This previous application was for a 'New practice area for golf course incorporating tees, bunkers, greens and driving range area' and was refused for the following reason:

The proposals, would by reason of the use/introduction of features alter the form, and activity levels, would alter the character and appearance of the site, to the detriment of the visual amenities of this sensitive location within the Metropolitan Green Belt and a Special Landscape Area, and directly adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Historic Parkland, and would also be harmful to wildlife interest. The proposals would result in a loss and fragmentation of valuable agricultural land and which in the absence of any over riding need for alternative use should be retained, would be contrary to policies EN1, 6, 7, 17C, 26, GB4, SR5 and 10 of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan, policies ENV1, 2, 3, 4, RS1 and SR2 of the Kent Structure Plan, and Policy FP8A of the emerging Structure Plan.

Principal Issues.

- 51 The main planning issues for consideration are:
- The principle of the development in Green Belt and Policy terms – the loss of agricultural land
 - The siting/impact of the development on the character and appearance of character and appearance of the site.
 - Impact upon ecology
 - Impact on adjacent public footpath and neighbouring properties
 - Impact upon surrounding highway network

Comments

- 52 NPPF (para 89) establishes that new buildings inside a Green Belt are inappropriate unless for one of a number of purposes. This includes the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport/outdoor recreation, as long as it preserves

the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

- 53 In this instance, whilst the description of the proposal as 'appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation' seems suitable, this paragraph relates to new buildings, and none are proposed.
- 54 Paragraph 81 states that local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to... provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
- 55 Whilst the NPPF is silent on changes of use, it is considered that the development does correspond with this paragraph, as the development involves providing opportunities for outdoor sport and, as will be discussed below, retains the landscape and enhances biodiversity.
- 56 Paragraph 90 also states 'that certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt'. These include engineering operations.
- 57 Slight alterations to the levels of the site are proposed, such as increasing the height of the hitting tee (up to 1.5m on the western side of the tee) and lowering a ridge which is sited approx 100-150m from the tee (by approx. 0.5- 1m) and using the spoil for the raised tee .The practice putting green will also be raised by 0.5m.
- 58 In this instance these limited works are considered appropriate for the Green Belt.
- 59 The proposal also does not involve any works that will detract from the openness of the Green Belt (no structures/nets etc other than hole flags and small -1m tall distance markers will be placed on the site).
- 60 It should be noted that a change of use was considered to be acceptable with application SE/12/01844/FUL which was to extend the existing car parking area (as a change of use) into the agricultural land adjacent to the proposed practice site.
- 61 In terms of the loss of agricultural land, there are longer any local plan polices that require the retention of valuable high grade agricultural land, however para 112 of the NPPF states that Local Authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The Rural Planning Consultant states that, as with the previous 2005 application, the land is considered to be outside the 'definition of "best and most versatile", so it would not warrant special consideration in terms of the impact on agricultural potential'.
- 62 As such it is considered that the proposed development complies with the provisions of the NPPF, (specifically para 81) and as such represents appropriate development within the Green Belt.

The impact of the development on the character and appearance of the wider landscape

- 63 Policy EN1 (from SDLP) and CC6 from (SEP) state that the proposed development should not have an adverse impact on the privacy and amenities of a locality.

- 64 Also relevant is policy SP1 from the Sevenoaks Core Strategy which states 'All new development should be designed to a high quality and should respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated', and LO8 which states that:
- 'The countryside will be conserved and the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity will be protected and enhanced where possible.'
- 65 The site will lose part of its existing open, undeveloped appearance by virtue of the landscaped nature of the practice ground however as stated above, no structures are proposed and the open grassed appearance of the site will remain. It should be noted that the relatively minor engineering operations only affect one small section of the overall site.
- 66 The previously refused scheme (05/00380/FUL) was set over pretty much the exact same site but proposed to introduce a five hole practice area in the western and northern section of the site, and a driving range area and pitching green within the eastern section. The development included some excavation to form bunkers and small increases in ground levels to form the tees.
- 67 The level of development previously proposed then was much more intensive and was considered to alter the form, activity levels and character and appearance of the whole site to its detriment. This application, given the scale parameters and separation distances involved, proposes and requires no safety netting or similar structures. The development is confined to one corner of the site adjacent to the main facilities.
- 68 The more low key development now proposed is not considered to have this detrimental impact upon the landscape. The rural aspect of the existing site is limited, neighboured as it is by housing and the existing golf course. Such development is not unusual in edge of settlement Green Belt land, and will not have an impact upon the adjacent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 69 The site is adjacent to the Knole Park Historic Parkland (where the existing golf club is situated). Given the limited impact of the development upon the landscape, and the proximity of the tee, practice and chipping green to the existing extended car park to the existing golf club buildings, it is not considered that the development will have a harmful impact upon the Historic Parkland.

Impact upon ecology

- 70 The Knole Park SSSI lies adjacent to the southern site boundary.
- 71 Policy SP11 of the Core Strategy states that the biodiversity of the District will be conserved and opportunities sought for enhancement to ensure no net loss of biodiversity.
- 72 A habitat survey and management strategy was submitted (by 'Greenspace Ecological Solutions' May 2013) which concluded that no rare or endangered plant species were noted within the site, and no further consideration to habitats or botanical species are required at this stage.
- 73 With regards to protected animal species, skylarks (one breeding pair and one single male) were found on site. The management plan concludes that to avoid

killing or injury to birds and/or the destruction of their eggs, works to the tussock grass area should be conducted outside the core breeding period for birds (March to August inclusive).

- 74 In terms of reptiles, bats and amphibians, the potential for these were found to be negligible and no further consideration required.
- 75 The development also proposed some ecological enhancements. These consist of the introduction of native species hedge grow on the southern end of the site along with infill tree and hedge planting to compliment the existing on the western side of the practice area, and the planting of a substantial wild seed mix area and areas of rough around the practice ground. The wild seed mix area (tussock grass) will provide for habitats for ground nesting birds (as illustrated in part 7.20 of the submitted survey and management plan).
- 76 The survey concludes that the site in its current state has little ecological value and the proposal is considered to have little/or no impact upon protected species/habitat. The enhancements will result (subject to bird protection measures) in an improved ecological diversity post development.
- 77 The KCC Ecology Officer states that subject to the reports advice on nesting bird protection being implemented and secured by condition (which is recommended), they have no objection to the proposal.
- 78 It is therefore considered that the proposed development will not have a detrimental impact upon the ecology or biodiversity of the site or surrounding SSS1 area.

Impact on adjacent public footpath and neighbouring properties

- 79 A public footpath (PROW SU17) runs along the eastern and southern boundary of the site. The PROW officer does not object to the proposal and does not anticipate that the foot path will be directly affected by the development, however her initial comments did raise concern about the direction of hitting and the possible need for netting to protect member of the public walking along the southwest to northwest section of the path.
- 80 The application makes it clear that no netting is required, and the applicant has confirmed that given the 'very wide margins' of at least 160m (from a centre line 100m from the tee), that this will not be necessary.
- 81 Subject to adequate signage during construction on the PROW, which would be controlled by the KCC PROW team, it is not therefore considered that the proposed development will have a detrimental impact upon the adjacent public right of way.
- 82 Similarly, given the separation distances to the adjacent dwellings, the nearest being Barnett Field to the north-east and Quarry Shaw to the north-west, a distance of 330m and 240m respectively from the tee (with Quarry Shaw approximately 180m from the centre line when drawn from the tee), it is not considered that the proposed use will have any impact upon these neighbouring dwellings.
- 83 Finally, in terms of noise nuisance, it should be noted that there is no restriction on the operation of agricultural machinery on this site, however golf ball collecting machinery can be intrusive. Whilst the practice area is limited to daylight hours in use, a condition is recommended (as the machinery can use illumination) to

prevent unnecessary use during quiet late hours that may cause nuisance in terms of noise to nearby dwellings.

Impact upon surrounding highway network

- 84 The proposed practice ground is to serve existing members and not the general public.
- 85 Any additional impact on the surrounding highway system would therefore be minimal, and the KCC Highways Officer does not object to the proposal.
- 86 Notwithstanding this, and as stated by the Highways Officer, it should be noted that highways issues was not part of the previous reason for refusal for application 05/00380/FUL.

Other Issues

- 87 The site is located within an Area of Archaeological Potential. Given that works are proposed in terms of levelling and earthworks (as detailed above), it is considered that a condition for a watching brief is appropriate.
- 88 Notwithstanding the above, 24 letters of objection were received, the relevant issues pertaining to which have been addressed above.
- 89 With regards to possible future development of the site, each application must be considered on its own merits, but the case of how this application and specific use is considered to comply with the NPPF is set out above. Any approval for this change of use would not alter the Green Belt nature of the site and the policy protection this entails.
- 90 Given that each application is considered on its own merits, it is not considered that this application sets a precedent for similar future development. In terms of a lighting scheme, this is not part of this application and its use will be constrained, like the Golf Course, to daylight hours. With regards to the wider benefit of the development, the NPPF (para 81) does not distinguish that for outdoor sport facilities or opportunities, they have to be public use rather than private use.
- 91 Finally, with the regards to the drainage issue raised, it is not considered that the extent of the proposed use and landscaping will have a significant impact upon drainage, and it is not considered that further information or conditions in this respect are appropriate or necessary.
- 92 It should also be noted that the majority of the policies quoted in the previous refusal reason no longer apply, they have not been saved from the Sevenoaks Local Plan or formed part of the now defunct Kent Structure Plan.

Conclusion

- 93 It is considered that this scheme is significantly different from the previously refused application in 2005.
- 94 Having carefully considered all issues raised in the previous reason for refusal, it is considered that the amended scheme now proposed complies with the current policy framework and overcomes this reason for refusal.

- 95 In conclusion, it is considered that the change of use from grazing land to practice facilities for The Knole Park Golf Club, to include practice tee, fairway bunker, practice putting and chipping green represents appropriate development within the Green Belt and will not detract from its openness, in accordance with NPPF. The development will also not detract from the character and appearance of the existing site or wider landscape, nor have a detrimental impact upon the amenities of any neighbours, the biodiversity of the site, nor upon highway safety or the nearby public right of way.
- 96 The proposal therefore represents complies with polices EN1 and VP1 of the Local Plan and SP1, SP11 and L08 of the Core Strategy.
- 97 Recommendation is to approve subject to conditions.

Contact Officer(s): Ben Phillips Extension: 7387

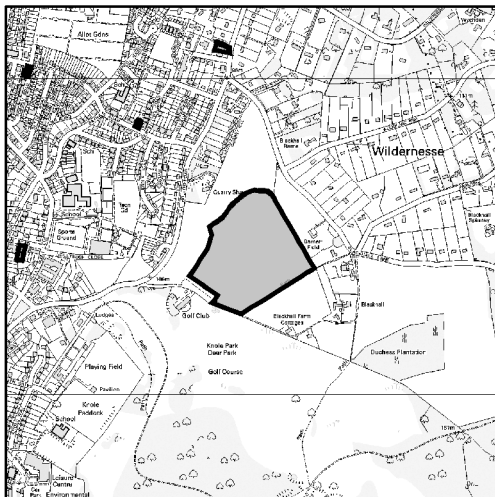
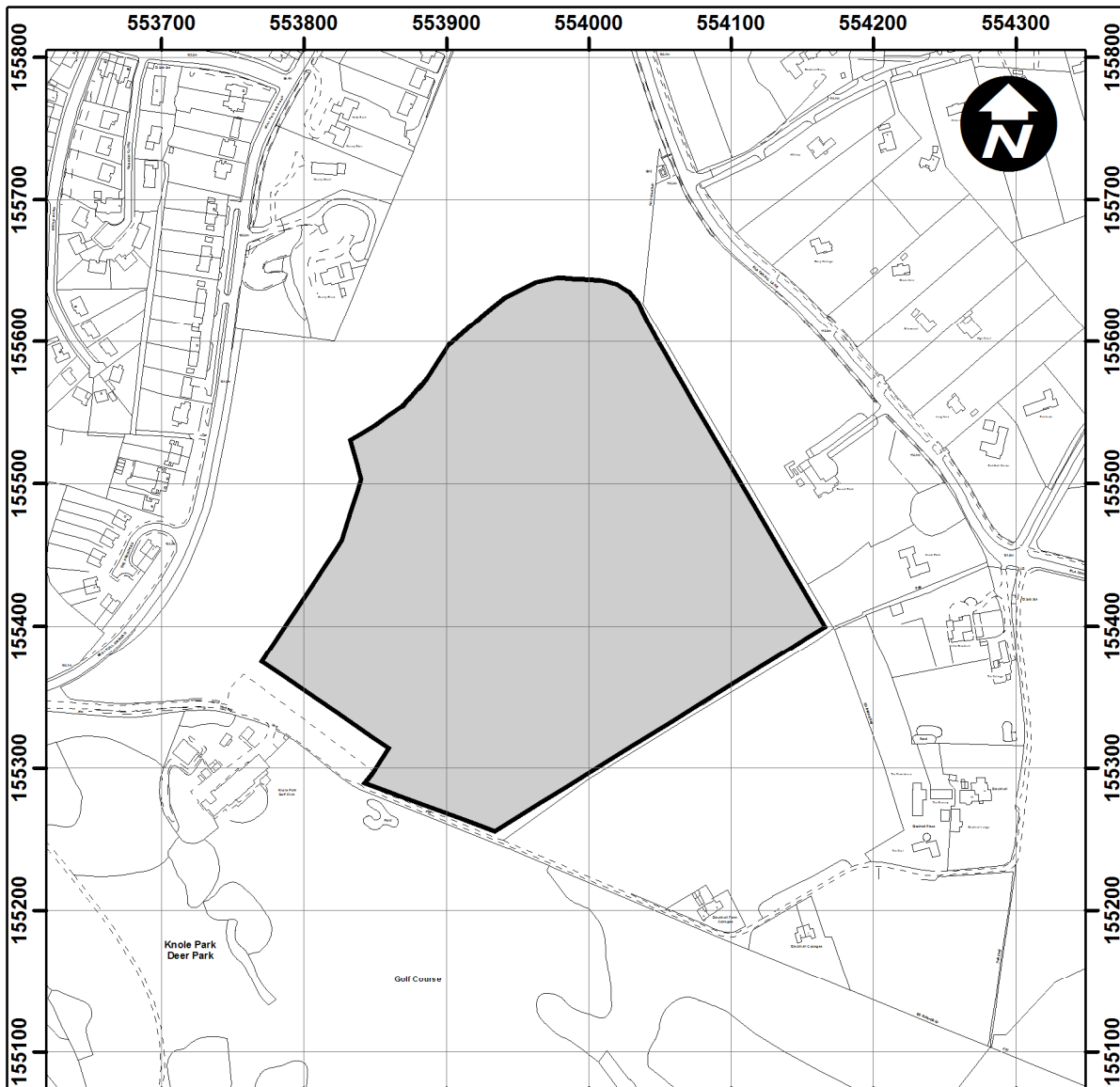
Richard Morris
Chief Planning Officer

Link to application details:

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=MNM8W3BK0L000>

Link to associated documents

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=MNM8W3BK0L000>



Site Plan

Scale 1:5,000

Date 21/08/2013



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BLOCK PLAN

