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<b>Ryarsh Downs</b>	<b>565130 158720</b>	<b>27.01.2005</b>	<b>TM/05/00118/FL</b>
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Proposal:	Extension of existing golf club involving addition of 2 new holes
Location:	West Malling Golf Club London Road Addington West Malling Kent ME19 5AR
Applicant:	West Malling Golf Club

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**1. Description:**

- 1.1 The application site comprises 3.2 ha of land and adjoins the eastern boundary of the existing 'Hurricane' course within the West Malling Golf Club. The application would create two new golf holes, although the tee of one hole and the green of the other one would be situated within the area of the existing golf club.
- 1.2 The application is being submitted as an area of land currently occupied by two existing holes on the Hurricane course (but owned by a third party), will shortly become unavailable for use by the golf club.

**2. The Site:**

- 2.1 The site lies within the MGB outside the settlement confines of the nearest village of Ryarsh. It lies approx. 150m north of London Road and as stated above adjoins the eastern boundary of the existing West Malling Golf Club. Public footpath MR 152, which runs from Roughetts Road to the east, cuts across the north east corner of the site.
- 2.2 The topography and landscape character changes dramatically across the site. The land drops steeply away at the western side of the site before rising to a plateau at the eastern side of the site. The south and west sides of the site are characterised by the presence of trees, which consist mainly of Silver Birch and Beech, although several Oak are also present. The flat plateau area of the site is by contrast, open in character. Whilst the lawful use of the land within the application site is agricultural, it appears from the condition and topography of the site that it has not been farmed for a long time.

**3. Planning History:**

- 3.1 None.

**4. Consultees:**

- 4.1 Ryarsh PC: The Parish Council raises objection to this application on highway grounds. Local concern is that there is an access road, which serves three properties in Roughetts Road, and there could be a possibility that access could be gained to the golf course. The Council would be opposed to this.

There is also the concern that this piece of land is distant from the clubhouse. People could park in the road and climb the fence and play on this part of the course without the club being aware. The Council would wish to top see a secure boundary on this area to prevent this from occurring.

4.2 Addington PC: No comments.

4.3 KCC (Public Rights of Way): Views awaited.

4.4 Private Reps (including Art 8 Site Notice): 18/0X/1S/3R. The letter supporting the application has been submitted by the owner of the application site and makes the following comments:

- The proposal would enable the continuance of the club to offer a 36 hole golf course providing a valuable and established resource for the benefit of the local economy and offering a resource for recreation and tourism.
- The parcel of land concerned is unsuitable for grazing cattle and has not been used for this purpose for some time.
- Given the undulating topography of the land and stands of trees, the use of the site as part of the golf club is entirely appropriate.

The three letters raising objections to the proposal, do so for the following reasons:

- The proposal fails to make the best use of the open land within the site.
- The plans do not record all of the trees in the area or the extent of the proposed planting.
- The trees provide a valuable habitat for birds including several species of the crow family and at least two species of woodpecker.
- The trees are the remains of a larger area of woodland and no further felling should be permitted.
- The felling of mature trees would be contrary to local plan policy P3/6 which protects the character of the Special Landscape Area.
- Loss of privacy.
- The submitted plans are not clear and accurate enough to determine.

## **5. Determining Issues:**

5.1 The main issues to consider with this application are the principle of the development and its impact upon the natural beauty of the Special Landscape Area (SLA).

- 5.2 PPG 2 (Green Belts) states at paragraph 1.6 that there should be opportunities for access to the open countryside and outdoor sport and recreation within Green Belts. The proposal would provide additional recreation facilities within the countryside but does not involve the erection of new buildings. I therefore consider that the proposal would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is therefore acceptable in broad policy terms.
- 5.3 Policy P6/12 of the TMBLP relates to recreation development in the countryside and states that proposals for facilities of a predominantly open nature will be permitted provided that a number of criteria are met.
- 5.4 The first of these criteria require proposals to preserve or enhance existing important landscape features, particularly the special characteristics in areas of identified landscape importance, and are in harmony with the rural appearance of the countryside. There is much concern amongst local residents and Ryarsh Parish Council regarding the loss of trees. The first issue to consider is that none of the trees within this are protected and as such could be removed without first requiring the Council's consent to do so. Having said that, it is always prudent to seek to minimise tree loss in connection with any proposed development, which is particularly important in this instance as the wooded area within the site makes a positive contribution to the character of the SLA. In this instance, of all the existing trees shown on the plan, only 8 are to be removed. Of these 3 are Silver Birch, one is a small drawn up Oak, whose growth appears to have been suppressed by the close proximity of other trees. The remaining 4 trees to be removed are Beech. Whilst these are indigenous trees, in light of the topography of the land and the number/location of the trees that would remain in place, I do not consider that the natural beauty of the SLA would be unduly harmed by this proposal. The submitted plans also show that young saplings situated in the area of one of the proposed fairways would be relocated to the northern end of the site. Furthermore, additional tree planting could be required under a landscaping condition.
- 5.5 The creation of one new tee and one new green within the site would not cause significant detriment to the natural beauty of the SLA, as these would involve very minor works. It is not proposed to re-contour the site, but instead, the layout of the proposed golf holes has been designed to follow the natural contours of the site.
- 5.6 In terms of the other requirements of policy P6/12 of the TMBLP, the proposal would not result in the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The land in question is only Grade 3. Due to the topography of the site and existing tree cover, the land in question is not particularly versatile in terms of agricultural potential.

- 5.7 The proposal would not result in the fragmentation or severance of an agricultural holding creating a non-viable agricultural unit. This is because the site is not presently used for agricultural purposes and also currently forms part of a much larger estate.
- 5.8 In terms of nature conservation interests, the site is not located within an area formally designated as an SSSI or SNCI. One of the local residents is concerned, however, that the application will result in the loss of some trees, which provide an important habitat for birds of the crow family as well as Woodpeckers. However, as many more trees will stay in place, than be removed under this proposal, I do not consider that the development would have a significant detrimental impact upon the wildlife interest within this site.
- 5.9 Concerns have also been expressed regarding highway safety. The proposed additional holes would be a natural extension to the existing golf course and as such would not amount to an additional facility within the golf club. Golfers would still have to use the existing clubhouse and vehicular access serving it in order to play the proposed holes. There would be no formal independent access to the proposed two golf holes. Whilst it is possible that people may access this part of the golf course from PROW MR152, rather than access it in the conventional manner, this would be a matter for the golf club to resolve.
- 5.10 The public footpath MR152 would cross the north east corner of the application site. However, due to the nature of the proposed use, the proposal should not prohibit access along this PROW. However, if permission were granted, the applicant would need to be advised of the presence of the public footpath in this part of the site; an informative can be used to achieve this. I cannot envisage a significant adverse impact in traffic terms.
- 5.11 The local residents have also objected to the proposal on grounds on loss of privacy. The nearest of these neighbours lives approx. 60 m away. Given the distances involved between the application site and the nearest residential dwellings,. I am satisfied that this proposal would not cause unacceptable detriment to the amenity of neighbouring residential properties.
- 5.12 In light of the above, I recommend that planning permission be granted.

## **6. Recommendation:**

- 6.1 **Grant Planning Permission**, as detailed in plans date stamped 13.01.2005, 21.01.2005 and 17.02.2005, subject to:
- No previously uncanvassed views being submitted by outstanding consultees, and;

- The following conditions:

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

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping and boundary treatment. All planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved scheme of landscaping shall be implemented during the first planting season following occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the earlier. Any trees or shrubs removed, dying, being seriously damaged or diseased within 10 years of planting shall be replaced in the next planting season with trees or shrubs of similar size and species, unless the Authority gives written consent to any variation. (L003)

Reason: Pursuant to Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and to protect and enhance the appearance and character of the site and locality.

Informative:

- 1 The is advised that the proposal must not interfere with or prohibit access to Public Right of Way MR152 which cross the north east corner of the application site. For further advice concerning this matter the applicant is advised to contact Ms J Searle, Kent County Council, Strategic Planning, West Kent PROW, 8 Abbey Wood Road, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4YT. Tel: (01732) 872829.

Contact: Matthew Broome