

**Tonbridge  
Higham**

**21 April 2026**

**26/00223/DR3**

Proposal: Installation of 3 x external Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) within a screened compound

Location: Poultwood Golf Course Higham Lane Tonbridge Kent TN11 9QR

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**1. Description:**

1.1 Permission is sought to install 3 no. Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) within a 23 sqm enclosure located to the south-east of the existing clubhouse and immediately southwest of the practice putting green. The ASHPs would replace an existing fossil fuel boiler to provide heating and hot water to the golf club. The ASHPs would be enclosed by brown louvred screening standing 3m in height.

**2. Reason for reporting to Full Council:**

2.1 This is a planning application for Council own development. As such the Council's Constitution requires the application to be reported to a full Council meeting.

**3. The Site:**

3.1 The site is located outside the urban confines on Tonbridge, to the north of the town. The site is located within the Green Belt and is accessed from Higham Lane. The site comprises a Golf Club containing an 18 hole course and a separate 9 hole course. An area of Ancient Woodland is located along the south west boundary of the site flanking Ashes Lane.

**4. Planning History (relevant):**

TM/70/10235/OLD grant with conditions 18 February 1970

Outline application for a eighteen hole golf course together with ancillary buildings, car park and club house.

TM/73/10417/OLD grant with conditions 8 May 1973

Erection of golf course depot, water storage tank and pump chamber.

TM/89/11900/FUL grant with conditions 7 April 1989

Extension to restaurant.

TM/92/00777/R4D grant with conditions 8 July 1992

Change of use to recreational land to be used as woodland adjoining existing golf course and as additional access point

TM/93/01286/DR3 grant with conditions 16 April 1993

9 hole short golf course

TM/93/01287/DR3 grant with conditions 23 August 1993

Submission of drainage, irrigation, engineering and contouring details submitted pursuant to conditions 9 and 10 of consent TM/93/0131DR3 - re 9 hole short golf course

TM/93/01288/DR3 grant with conditions 30 September 1993

TM/06/02709/DR3 Grant With Conditions 6 October 2006

Development of practice ground building, additional car parking area and erection of safety netting and supporting poles

## **5. Consultees:**

- 5.1 Environmental Protection: No objections but details should be submitted demonstrating that the noise level of the ASHPs is 5dB lower than background noise levels at the boundary of the nearest noise sensitive premises.
- 5.2 Neighbours (Site Notice only) 27.03.2026: No response

## **6. Determining Issues:**

### **Principle of the development**

- 6.1 The site is located outside of the Tonbridge Urban area within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Policy CP14 of the TMBCS seeks to control development within the countryside, outside of any defined settlement or urban boundary. However, it allows under point (h) for predominantly open recreational uses together with associated essential built infrastructure. Given that the purpose of the development is to provide a more sustainable and less polluting energy source for the golf club, it can be regarded as essential built infrastructure for a

predominantly open recreational use. As such the development does not conflict with policy CP 14.

6.2 Policy CP 3 states that with regard to development within the Green Belt, National Green belt policy will be applied.

6.3 National Green Belt Policy is currently contained within section 13 of the NPPF. Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

6.4 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF focusses on proposals affecting Green Belts it states:

*“When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. ‘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.”*

6.5 Paragraph 154 goes on to set out what is meant by appropriate development within a Green Belt. Under point b of this paragraph, the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land) including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation are considered appropriate 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 purposes of including land within the Green Belt are set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF and are listed as follows.

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- 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.

6.6 Bearing in mind the nature and very limited size of the proposed development and that it would be located close to the existing club house building, the installation of the three ASHPs within a louvred enclosure will clearly not undermine the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Furthermore, for the same reasons the development will not cause any additional harm to the openness of the Green Belt either.

- 6.7 Taking all of the above into account, the principle of the development is considered to be acceptable in terms of development plan policies CP3 and CP 14 as well as national Green Belt policy contained within the NPPF.

### **Character of the development**

- 6.8 Policy CP24 of the TMBCS states at point (1):

*“All development must be well designed and of a high quality in terms of detailing and use of appropriate materials, and must through its scale, density, layout, siting, character and appearance be designed to respect the site and its surroundings.”*

- 6.9 This is echoed in policy SQ1 of the MDE DPD which requires proposals to protect and conserve the character and local distinctiveness of local character areas.
- 6.10 The proposed ASHPs and their enclosure will occupy a very small area of mown grass adjacent to the clubhouse and practice green. The enclosure will be seen in the context of the much larger building and will not require the removal of any trees. As such it will be entirely in keeping with the character of this wooded golf course. The proposal therefore complies with development plan policies CP 24 and SQ1.

### **Neighbour Amenity**

- 6.11 There are no neighbouring houses located close to the position of the proposed ASHP's. The nearest dwelling is over 350m away (East Lodge, North Frith Park) to the east and is separated by woodland and the golf course itself. The noise arising from the ASHPs is unlikely to be noticeable to this neighbouring property. However, in order to safeguard the amenity of its occupiers, a condition is recommended to require the noise emitted by the ASHPs to be no higher than background noise levels when measured at the boundary of the nearest noise sensitive premises. A separate condition is also recommended that the enclosure is installed around the ASHPs prior to their first operation and then to remain in place at all times to help limit noise emittance.

### **Ecology and Bio-diversity Net Gain**

- 6.12 Policy NE4 (MDE DPD) sets out that the extent of tree cover and the hedgerow network should be maintained and enhanced. It also states (at point 3)

*“Ancient woodland will be protected, and where possible, enhanced through improved management. Development that would adversely affect ancient woodland will not be permitted unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location can be demonstrated to override the harm that*

*would be caused to the ecological and historical importance of the ancient woodland”.*

- 6.13 The golf course itself is surrounded by Ancient Woodland. Whilst slivers of Ancient woodland remain within and adjoining the golf course, the site of the ASHPs lies outside of the Ancient Woodland itself, albeit within its 15m buffer. However, the southwest corner of the clubhouse building itself lies within the same buffer. The area proposed to site the ASHPs is a piece of semi-improved grassland, closely mown and located next to the clubhouse and a putting green. It does not contain irreplaceable habitat and indeed is a poor habitat for most species. The location of three no. ASHPs in an enclosure here would not harm the Ancient Woodland itself or the habitat of species living within it.
- 6.14 Since February 2024, Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). All development (except some that are exempt) need to deliver a BNG of 10%. However, in this particular case, as the area of land affected by the proposed development measures less than 25 square metres it is exempt from providing BNG.

### **Energy**

- 6.15 As part of its Climate change Strategy, the Council is committed to reducing emissions from energy consumption in all Council buildings and ensure that climate change is a recognised commitment within the corporate strategy. This proposal will see the existing gas fired boilers (which is the main source of heating across the borough) replaced with ASHPs which produce zero emissions at source. Accordingly, the proposed development will be a benefit in terms of reducing the Council’s carbon (and other) emissions and compliant with the Council’s Climate Change Strategy.

### **Other Matters and concluding comments**

- 6.16 Due to the nature and siting of the proposed ASHPs behind the club house, they will not reduce the amount of car parking serving the golf club and will not create a need for any additional car parking to be provided.
- 6.17 The proposed development is acceptable in principle in this rural Green Belt location given its purpose is to provide essential infrastructure to an existing leisure facility. Furthermore, the proposal is welcome from a climate change point of view as it will reduce the golf club’s carbon and other emissions by replacing gas boilers with ASHPs.
- 6.18 The development will not harm the character of the Golf course or wider rural locality due to the small scale and sensitive siting of the proposed ASHPs and their enclosure close to the existing club house building. For the same reasons

it will not cause harm to the amenity of the nearest residential properties located quite some distance away.

6.19 The development will not harm irreplaceable habitat (Ancient Woodland), nor would it require the removal of any trees within the site.

6.20 Taking all of the above into account, this modest development is considered to be acceptable in planning terms and is, therefore recommended for approval.

## **7. Recommendation:**

### **7.1 Grant Planning Permission**

subject to the following:

#### **Conditions / Reasons**

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

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

2. The development shall be undertaken in accordance with the following approved drawings and documents:

Location Plan dated 10.02.2026, Block Plan dated 10.02.2026, Diagram Detail A dated 10.02.2026, Other Information sheet dated 10.02.2026,

Reason: To ensure that the development is undertaken in accordance with the approved details.

3. The Air Source heat Pumps shall not be operated until the louvred screen enclosure has been erected and shall be retained in place at all times thereafter.

Reason: To avoid unreasonable disturbance to nearby residential properties.

4. Prior to installation of the ASHPs a report shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, demonstrating that the noise from the operations of the air source heat pumps emitted from the site shall be lower than the existing background noise level by at least 5dB when measured at the boundary with the nearest noise-sensitive premises. The measurements and assessment shall be made according to BS4142:2014 +A1:2019.

Reason: To avoid unreasonable disturbance to nearby residential properties.

