

COMMITTEE AGENDA REFERENCE: 5C

APPLICATION REF:	RU.23/1489
LOCATION	East Course, Wentworth Golf Club, Wentworth Estate, Virginia Water, Wentworth Drive, GU25 4JZ
PROPOSAL	Engineering works to the East Course including; creation of new golf tee positions, bunkers, cart path routes and general land profiling and associated works
TYPE	Full Planning Permission
EXPIRY DATE	07/02/2024
WARD	Virginia Water
CASE OFFICER	Catrin Davies
REASON FOR COMMITTEE DETERMINATION	Major application
<i>If you have questions about this report please contact Ashley Smith, Victoria Gibson or the case officer.</i>	

1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended the Planning Committee authorises the HoP:

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| 1. | To grant planning permission subject to conditions as detailed in section 11 of this report. |
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2. DETAILS OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

2.1 The application relates to part of the Wentworth Golf Club, which is a large private landholding within the general settlement area of Virginia Water. The wider Wentworth Golf Club comprises extensive grounds including; three 18 hole golf courses, one 9 hole course, main clubhouse, supporting facilities, as well as a tennis and health club. The application site comprises defined areas on each of the 18 holes that make up the 'East Course'.

2.2 Site constraints

- Green Belt
- A small section of the northern part of the East Course is within Flood Zone 2
- Site of Nature Conversation Importance
- Biodiversity Opportunity Area

- Site of Special Scientific Interest Buffer Zone

3. APPLICATION DETAILS

3.1 This application seeks planning permission for engineering operations to the East Course. The application site comprises defined areas on each of the 18 holes that make up the 'East Course'. The works proposed on each hole vary in their complexity and scope and consequently the extent of the red line boundary is defined to cover the area of the proposed works. These include:

- Reprofiting of the fairways with refinements to playing levels
- Formation of new golf tee positions and reversion of existing positions to natural habitats
- Excavation of new bunkers
- Rationalisation of existing cart paths and formation of new paths
- Clearance of low lying vegetation to maintain sight lines on field of play
- Re-edging of bunkers and greens to improve playing surface
- Reinstatement of native vegetation to the course

3.2 The works at each hole are as follows:

- Hole 1- New bunker
- Hole 2- New forward tee
- Hole 3- New forward tee, fill in bunker, create of two new bunkers, combine bunkers
- Hole 4- New forward tee
- Hole 5- Removal of cart path and bridge, construction of new cart path, new forward tee, recycling bridge for dutch crossing, resurfacing cart path,
- Hole 6- Removal of cart path, constructing new cart path, constructing of dutch crossing, new forward tee, new bunker, new heather ridge,
- Hole 7- New forward tee
- Hole 8- New forward tee and reshape and extend bunker
- Hole 9- New forward tee
- Hole 10- New forward tee
- Hole 11- New bunker, restoration of bunker, new forward tee
- Hole 12- New tee with extension to existing tee, new cart path
- Hole 13- New forward tee, restoration of bunkers, rebuilding bunkers
- Hole 14- New tee complex, new forward tee, new bunkers, removal of existing tees
- Hole 15- New tee, new forward tee, removal of trees, extension and restoring

bunkers

- Hole 16- New forward tee, new bunkers, new heather beds
- Hole 17- Reinstate old forward tee
- Hole 18- New forward tee and new cart path

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There is extensive planning history to the wider Golf Club, the most recent being:

Reference	Details
RU.23/1213	The erection of a building for golf performance training and practice with practice game area, landscaping and associated development following demolition of existing building. Grant consent. 3/1/2024
RU.23/1841	Refurbishment works and external alterations to the storm shelter on the 13th hole of the East Course to facilitate operation as an enclosed toilet block alongside associated operations. Pending consideration
RU.23/1842	Replacement of the existing East Course starter hut with a timber framed hut alongside associated landscaping works. Pending consideration
RU.23/1843	Construction of rear extension with alterations to the elevations and associated works. Pending consideration

5 SUMMARY OF MAIN RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE DECISION

5.1 National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance.

5.2 The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan was adopted on 16 July 2020 and the policies have to be read as a whole. Any specific key policies will be referred to in the planning considerations.

5.3 SPDs which might be a material consideration in determination:

- Green and Blue Infrastructure (November 2021)
- Runnymede Design Guide

5.4 This site falls within the designated Virginia Water Neighbourhood Area. However, a

neighbourhood Plan has not been developed yet for this area.

6. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

Consultees responses

Consultee	Comments
Lead Local Flood Authority	No comment
Surrey Wildlife Trust	No objection subject to condition
RBC Drainage Engineer	No comment
Tree Officer	Request additional information, the tree report originally submitted only referenced the trees at hole 14 the Tree Officer requested further assessments on the entire site. The applicant updated the tree report to reference the wider site.
SCC Archaeology	No objection subject to condition
Virginia Water Neighbourhood Forum	No comment

Representations and comments from interested parties

6.2 Four site notices were displayed around the application site, the application was advertised in the press and on the Council's website. Further to this no letters of representation have been received.

7. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 In the determination of this application regard must be had to the Development Plan and National policy within the NPPF. This must be considered in light of the presumption in favour of sustainable development advocated by the NPPF. The key planning matters are:

- Principle of the development in the Green Belt
- Design consideration including landscaping and trees.
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Energy and sustainability
- Other Considerations

Principle of the development in the Green Belt

- 7.2 The NPPF advises that the construction of new development, within the Green Belt should be considered inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 154 details certain buildings can be exceptions to this, including the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport. This is subject to the facilities preserving the openness of the Green Belt and not conflicting with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 155 sets out further exceptions, including certain engineering operations, however these are also subject to the above assessment concerning openness. Policy EE16 on Outdoor Sport and Recreation in the Green Belt and Policy EE18 relating to engineering operations in the Green Belt of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan are both consistent with the above national policy.
- 7.3 The existing use of the site is as a golf course the proposed works are intended to improve the facilities at the golf course. The proposed development is considered to be engineering operations. Therefore, in order for the principle of the development to be considered acceptable in the Green Belt it is necessary to consider if the proposals preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 7.4 In terms of impact on openness, the key principle is that it is not simply about volume, visual impact is implicitly part of the concept of openness of the Green Belt. It is also necessary to consider the impact or harm, if any, wrought by the change. In other words, 'openness' is open-textured and many factors are capable of being a material consideration. The proposal will result in alterations to the landscaping of the golfing holes including new tees and bunkers and the constructing of cart paths. Whilst some hard standing will be removed (sections of the cart bath and bridge), and some additional hardstanding is also proposed. Overall, the increase in hardstanding is considered limited. As a whole these are considered to form development/ paraphernalia associated with the use of the site as a Golf Club (which is an appropriate use in the Green Belt). As such the engineering operations are considered to reflect the existing character of the golf course, and open sport/ recreational use of the area. Therefore, both visually and spatially it is considered that the proposal would preserve the openness of the Green Belt.
- 7.5 In terms of the purposes of the Green Belt, 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; these are set out in paragraph 138 of the NPPF (2021). Given the sites location and the development proposed it is not considered that the proposal would undermine the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 7.6 In view of the above, the proposal is considered to be appropriate development in the Green Belt and due to the reasons above is considered to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt. The proposal complies with the NPPF and policy EE16 and EE18 of the Local Plan.

Design consideration including landscaping and trees

- 7.7 Policy EE1 seeks attractive and resilient places that make a positive contribution to the landscape setting, paying respect to layout, form, and scale. Policy EE1 (Townscape and Landscape Quality), seeks to create high quality and inclusive design which responds to local context. Regard should also be had to the Runnymede Design Guide SPD. The NPPF further strengthens the importance of good design to create 'high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings, and places' (para. 126, NPPF).

- 7.8 The application site is an existing golf course, the proposal would result in visual improvement in terms of new planting. The proposed scheme is considered to be visually acceptable given the context and existing wider use of the land however it is recognised that the proposal would result in the loss of a modified grasslands and trees.
- 7.9 In terms of landscaping/ trees, a total of 10 trees removed in total 9 category B one category C. The proposal will also result in the replanting of 23 new trees to mitigate the loss. New trees are proposed on the 18th hole this is shown on Map 5 of the Ecological Appraisal submitted in support of the planning application. Full details can be secured by way of recommended conditions to secure suitable mitigation both in terms of quality and quantity of trees.
- 7.10 The proposal has been designed to protect the root protection areas of the retaining trees, the tree protection is for hole 14 only as the trees for hole 15 are to be removed. The Tree protection is considered acceptable and will be conditioned.

Ecology and biodiversity

- 7.11 Policies SD7 and EE9 of the Local Plan sets out that development should protect existing biodiversity and include opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain. Policy EE11 of the Local Plan further states that the Council will seek development to contribute towards the delivery of a high quality multi-functional Green Infrastructure network by requiring proposals to provide and make enhancements to onsite Green Infrastructure assets. Furthermore Policy EE12 requires the delivery of a high quality multi-functional blue Infrastructure network by expecting Blue Infrastructure assets to be provided, protected, maintained and enhanced to deliver multiple benefits and services for biodiversity, recreation and landscape.
- 7.12 The submission by the applicants includes an Ecology Appraisal and a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) metric. This has been updated during the consideration of the planning application following comments made by Surrey Wildlife Trust (in their role as our ecology advisers.)
- 7.13 Proposals include the loss of modified grassland where new sand bunkers are to be created. As well as the loss of trees and heather for the creation of new forward tees. To mitigate the loss the proposal will include new heather planting across the golf course, as well as the enhancement of heather within the Site. New tree planting is also proposed within parts of the site.
- 7.14 Overall, the application has been amended since the initial submission to demonstrate 10% biodiversity net gain was achieved. This includes proposed planting in the form of; dwarf shrub heath, in the form of heather, Scots Pine woodland and Broadleaved woodland which will all be enhanced to a higher category, as well as some tree planting. The enhancement will be through a change in management strategy for the heather, invasive species management and ground flora planting, as well as supplementary planting. In summary, using the DEFRA metric calculator, a total net unit change of 6.62 habitat units or 10.05% biodiversity net gain is proposed as part of this planning application.
- 7.15 The proposed mitigation and enhancements are considered suitable and comply with SD7 and EE9, these will be secured via a condition.

Other Considerations

- 7.16 In terms of flooding considerations, the NPPF and policy EE13 of the Local Plan requires that planning application take full account of flood risk. Whilst a small section of the East

Course is within Flood Zone 2 the majority of the site is within Flood Zone 1. Due to the nature of the proposal it is not considered to increase the risk of flooding else. The Council's drainage officer has no objections to the proposal.

- 7.17 In terms of neighbouring amenity, the application site is an existing golf course. The proposal is not considered to result in a significant intensification of the use therefore would not materially affect the amenity of the occupiers of nearby residential properties.
- 7.18 Due to the site area, the applicant has submitted an Archaeological desk-based assessment. The report concluded that there would be a low potential of the site to contain significant archaeological assets. SCC Archology have responded and raised no objection. The proposal complies with EE7.
- 7.19 The proposed development is for alterations, changes and engineering operations associated with an existing 19 hole golf course, which forms part of a wider complex of Wentworth Golf Club. The proposal is not to increase the number of persons who visit the wider Golf Club and as such is not considered to raise any further issues in terms of highway capacity and/or parking matters.

8. PLANNING OBLIGATIONS/COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

- 8.1 The proposal is not CIL liable.

9. EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 Consideration has been given to Articles 1 and 8 of the First Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not considered that the decision would result in a violation of any person's rights under the Convention.

Consideration has been given to s149 of the Equality Act 2010 (as amended), which has imposes a public sector equality duty that requires a public authority in the exercise of its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

It is considered that the decision would have regard to this duty.

10. CONCLUSIONS

- 10.2 in summary, the proposal is considered to be appropriate development in the Greenbelt, is visually acceptable, office suitable ecological mitigation and enhancements and is not considered to raise any other issues. The development has been assessed against the following Development Plan policies – EE1, EE9, EE11 EE18 SD4 and SD7 of the

Runnymede 2030 Local Plan, the policies of the NPPF, guidance in the PPG, and other material considerations including third party representations. It has been concluded that the development would not result in any harm that would justify refusal in the public interest. The decision has been taken in compliance with the requirement of the NPPF to foster the delivery of sustainable development in a positive and proactive manner.

11. FORMAL OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

The HoP be authorised to grant planning permission subject the subject to the following planning conditions:

Recommendation conditions

1. Standard three-year time limit

The development for which planning permission is hereby granted must be commenced no later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 51 of Part 4 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. Approved Plan

The development hereby permitted shall not be carried out except in complete accordance with the approved drawings as set out in the submitted Schedule of Plans 6 February 2024. This includes finish floor levels.

Reason: To ensure high quality design and to comply with Policy EE1 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance in the NPPF.

3. Materials

The development hereby permitted shall be constructed entirely of the materials as stated in the Schedule of Materials February 2024.

Reason: To ensure high quality design and to comply with Policy EE1 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance within the NPPF.

4. Ecology and biodiversity

The development hereby approved shall be undertaken in accordance Recommendations as set out in the Ecological Appraisal Letters prepared by EPR dated 19th January 2024. Development shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details for the construction of the development and the mitigation proposed within the above reports shall be undertaken prior to occupation of the development hereby approved.

Reason: To ensure the provision of suitable mitigation for bats in accordance with Policy EE9 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance within the NPPF.

5. Tree protection

The works shall be carried out in accordance with the Arboricultural Impact Assessments, Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan prepared by Merewood dated 23/10/2023 and the Arboricultural Impact

Assessments prepared by Merewood dated 20/12/2023. The protective measures shall remain in place until all works are complete and all machinery and materials have finally left site. Nothing shall be stored or placed in any area fenced in accordance with this condition, nor shall any fires be started, no tipping, refuelling, disposal of solvents or cement mixing carried out and ground levels within those areas shall not be altered, nor shall any excavation or vehicular access, other than that detailed within the approved plans, be made without the written consent of the LPA.

There shall be no burning within six metres of the canopy of any retained tree(s). Where the approved protective measures and methods are not employed or are inadequately employed or any other requirements of this condition are not adhered to, remediation measures, to a specification agreed in writing by the LPA, shall take place prior to first occupation of the development, unless the LPA gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To protect the trees to be retained, enhance the appearance and biodiversity of the surrounding area and to comply with Policies EE1, EE9 and EE11 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance within the NPPF.

6. Landscaping

Notwithstanding the approved plans or any indication given otherwise, prior to any works above ground level full details of hard and soft landscaping scheme (including full details of replacement tree planting as shown on Map 5 of the ecological appraisal) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include a schedule of when all works shall take place.

All approved landscaping works shall be retained in accordance with the approved details. If within a period of five years from the date of planting of any tree or shrub shown on the approved landscaping plan, that tree or shrub, or any tree or shrub planted in replacement for it, is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, or becomes seriously damaged or defective, another tree or shrub of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted in the immediate vicinity, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its prior written permission to any variation.

Reason: To ensure the development is adequately landscaped and to comply with Policy EE9, EE11 and EE12 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance within the NPPF.

7. Landscape Environmental Management Plan

Prior to any works above ground level a Landscape Environmental Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The management plan needs to secure the retention and enhancement of habitats within the Site and selected elements within the wider site, by the creation of new habitats within the blue line, and the ongoing positive nature conservation management of all new and retained/enhanced habitats. These shall include measures aligned with the biodiversity net gain strategy set out in Ecological Appraisal Letters prepared by EPR dated 19th January 2024. This Plan shall

accord with the schedule associated with condition 6 (Landscaping).

Reason: In the interest of protecting potential ecological value and species in the site as required by Policies EE9, EE11 and EE12 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and guidance within the NPPF.