

Agenda Item 25.

Application Number	Expiry Date	Parish	Ward
210179	15/07/2021	Wokingham Town	Evendons; Finchampstead North;

Applicant	Sand Martins Golf Club Limited
Site Address	Sand Martins Golf Club, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 3RQ
Proposal	Full Planning application for the proposed part single, part two storey side/rear extension to existing clubhouse, erection of a detached Hotel Building comprising 39no. bedrooms, function rooms, kitchen and staff room, with car parking, servicing, associated landscape enhancements and an electrical sub-station.
Type	Full
Officer	Mark Croucher
Reason for determination by committee	Major application

FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Planning Committee on Wednesday, 11 August 2021
REPORT PREPARED BY	Assistant Director – Place

SUMMARY
<p>The application is for the erection a 39-bedroom hotel with associated facilities such as a restaurant and function rooms that will be linked to the existing Sand Martins golf course. This will also include extending the existing clubhouse along with associated parking areas, footpaths and soft landscaping.</p> <p>The site is within the countryside and the development would impact the landscape; however, the merits of this application clearly outweigh the harm and overall the application is recommended for approval. There would be social and economic benefits, facilitating the growth of a local business, increasing employment opportunities and improving a recreational facility.</p> <p>The hotel building and clubhouse extension will utilise contemporary design features along with more traditional elements, creating a building for the here and now but also contextually appropriate to the local area and history of the site.</p> <p>Overall, the benefits of the application outweigh the harm and it therefore complies with the development plan when considered as a whole. The recommendation is to approve the application subject to a legal agreement and conditions, the requirements of which are set out in this report.</p>

PLANNING STATUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countryside • Public Rights of Way • Flood Zone 1 • Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone • 5km SPA Zone • 7km SPA Zone • Habitat suitable for bats

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee authorise the **GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION** subject to the following:

- A. Prior completion of a legal agreement pursuant to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to secure an Employment Skills Plan. If the Agreement is not completed within 3 months of the date of this resolution, Planning Permission will be refused unless the Operational Manager for Development Management in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning Committee agree to a later date.

B. Conditions and informatives:

Conditions:

Time limit

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

Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

Approved details

2. This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered / titled B100 00, B200 05, B201 05, B202 05, B203 05, B300 05, B301 05, B400 05, B401 00, B600 00, 010 00, 011 00, 101 00, A020 00, A021 00, A022 00, A029 00, A030 00, A030 00, A050 00, A051 00, A100 00, A110 00, A200 05, A201 05, A202 05, A209 05, A300 05, A301 05, A400 05 and 401 05. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

Materials

3. Before any above ground construction works, samples and details of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces, including PV or solar panels, of the building/s shall have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Development shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the so-approved details.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

Trees and Landscape

4. a) No development or other operation shall commence on site until an Arboricultural Method Statement and Scheme of Works which provides for the retention and protection of trees, shrubs and hedges growing on or adjacent to the site in accordance with BS5837: 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No development or other operations shall take place except in complete accordance with the details as so-approved (hereinafter referred to as the Approved Scheme).

b) No operations shall commence on site in connection with development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening or any other operation involving use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until the tree protection works required by the Approved Scheme are in place on site.

c) No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within an area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the Approved Scheme.

d) The fencing or other works which are part of the Approved Scheme shall not be moved or removed, temporarily or otherwise, until all works including materials removed from the site, unless the prior approval in writing of the local planning authority has first been sought and obtained.

Reason: To secure the protection throughout the time that the development is being carried out of trees shrubs or hedges growing within or adjacent to the site which are of amenity value to the area, and to allow for verification by the local planning authority that the necessary measures are in place before development and other works commence

5. Prior to the commencement of the development a Landscape Management Plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities, timescales and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The landscape management plan shall be carried out as approved.

Reason: In order to ensure that provision is made to allow satisfactory maintenance of the landscaping hereby approved.

Archaeology

6. No development shall take place within the application area until the applicant, their agents or successors in title have secured and implemented a programme of archaeological field evaluation in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The results of the evaluation will inform the preparation of a mitigation strategy which will be submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development. The mitigation strategy will provide for:

i) A programme of site investigation and recording, or alternative appropriate mitigation, within the area of archaeological interest. Development will not commence within the area of archaeological interest until the site investigation has been satisfactorily completed.

ii) A programme of post investigation assessment, analysis, publication, dissemination and archiving. This part of the condition shall not be discharged until these elements of the programme have been fulfilled in accordance with the programme set out in the WSI or unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority

Reason: The site lies within an area of archaeological potential; specifically relating to the former Evendons manor house and any medieval antecedents. A programme of archaeological work is required to mitigate the impact of

development and to record any surviving remains in order to advance our understanding of their significance in accordance with national and local plan policy.

Drainage

7. No development shall take place until details of the drainage system for the site have been submitted to and approved in writing by the LPA.
 1. Confirmation from drainage system owner that the capacity will be sufficient to which control discharge is proposed.
 2. If there is a new discharge point to ordinary watercourse consent is required and approving body is WBC.
 3. Existing and proposed drainage layout plan including but not necessarily limited to - details of land drains/watercourses, pipes and their capacities and discharge points.

The approved scheme shall be implemented prior to the first occupation of the development and shall be maintained in the approved form for as long as the development remains on the site.

Reason: to prevent increased flood risk from surface water run-off. Relevant policy: NPPF Section 10 (Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change), Core Strategy policy CP1 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC09 and CC10.

Highways

8. No works shall commence on site until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), which includes working hours, has been submitted to the LPA and approved in writing. The details hereby approved shall be fully implemented.

Reason: In the interests of highway safety & convenience and neighbour amenities. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP6.

9. No part of any building(s) hereby permitted shall be occupied or used until the vehicle parking and turning space has been provided in accordance with the approved plans. The vehicle parking and turning space shall be retained and maintained in accordance with the approved details and the parking space shall remain available for the parking of vehicles at all times and the turning space shall not be used for any other purpose other than vehicle turning.

Reason: In the interest if highway safety.

10. Prior to the occupation of the hotel building hereby permitted, details of secure and covered bicycle storage/ parking facilities for the occupants of [and visitors to] the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The cycle storage/ parking shall be implemented in accordance with such details as may be approved before occupation of the development hereby permitted, and shall be permanently retained in the approved form for the parking of bicycles and used for no other purpose.

Reason: In order to ensure that secure weather-proof bicycle parking facilities are provided so as to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel. Relevant policy: NPPF Section 4 (Sustainable Transport) and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.

11. 10% of the proposed parking spaces provided shall have electrical charging points and these shall be maintained and kept available for the lifetime of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
Reason: to ensure to use of the electric vehicles are catered for. policy: NPPF Section 4 (Sustainable Transport) and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.
12. Prior to the completion and operation of the development hereby approved, a Travel Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The travel plan shall include a programme of implementation and proposals to promote alternative forms of transport to and from the site, other than by the private car and provide for periodic review. The travel plan shall be fully implemented, maintained and reviewed as so approved.
Reason: To encourage the use of all travel modes. Relevant policy: NPPF Section 4 (Sustainable Transport) and Core Strategy policy CP6.

Noise

13. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, the applicant shall carry out a noise impact assessment of the operation of the permitted development and submit, for written approval, to the Local Planning Authority. The approved noise impact assessment shall include a scheme that set out how the break-out of noise from operations will be minimised and managed and include hours of operation. The details thereby agreed shall be fully implemented in perpetuity.
Reason: To protect the occupants of nearby residential properties from noise
14. The sound rating level (established in accordance with BS4142:2014) of any plant, machinery and equipment installed or operated in connection with this permission shall not exceed, at any time, the prevailing background sound level at the nearest residential or noise sensitive property. If the plant, machinery or equipment is to be enclosed details of the enclosure shall be sent to the local planning authority for their approval before the development commences
Reason: To protect the occupants of nearby residential properties from noise

Waste details

15. No building shall be occupied until details of on-site collection area(s) for refuse and recyclable materials have been constructed in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The collection areas/ facilities shall be permanently retained as so-approved and used for no purpose other than the temporary storage of refuse and recyclable materials
Reason: To ensure the efficient collection of waste materials whilst avoiding highway obstruction and loss of visual amenity, in the interests of a functional development, the character of the area, highway safety & convenience and the quality of the pedestrian environment. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC04.

Ecology

16. Prior to occupation of the Hotel Building, a long-term management plan for biodiversity net gain to the site, in line with the measures outlined in section 8.5 of the submitted Ecological Appraisal report (Hankinson Duckett, ref: 973.1, January 2021) and demonstrating a minimum 10% net gain using the latest Defra

metric, shall be provided to the local authority for its approval. This strategy shall be prepared by a suitably qualified ecologist and appropriate to the local ecological context. Once approved the strategy shall be implemented in full unless otherwise agreed by the local authority in writing.

Reason: to ensure that the proposal is in accordance with Section 41 NERC Act re. UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species (Species of Principal Importance) and complies with Planning Policies for Wildlife including CP7 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010), and the National Planning Policy Framework which requires consideration of the potential biodiversity gains that can be secured within developments.

17. No works affecting the bat roosts shall commence until a licence for development works affecting bats has been obtained from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (Natural England) and a copy (or an email from Natural England that the site has been registered under the bat mitigation class licence) has been submitted to the local planning authority. Thereafter mitigation measures approved in the licence shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details. Should conditions at the site for bats change and / or the applicant conclude that a licence for development works affecting bats is not required the applicant is to submit a report to the council detailing the reasons for this assessment and this report is to be approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to commencement of works.

Reason: To ensure that bats, a material consideration, are not adversely affected by the development.

18. Prior to occupation of the Hotel Building, a lighting design strategy for biodiversity for the site, including car parks and access road, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The strategy shall:
- a) Identify those areas/features that are particularly sensitive for bats and that are likely to cause disturbance; and
 - b) Show how and where external lighting will be installed (through provision of appropriate lighting contour plans and technical specifications) so that it can be clearly demonstrated that areas to be lit will not disturb or prevent the above species having access to their breeding sites and resting places.

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specification and locations set out in the strategy and these shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the strategy. Under no circumstances should any other external lighting be installed without prior consent from the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that bats are not adversely affected by the development and the proposal has an acceptable impact on amenity.

19. No ground preparation including vegetation clearance shall commence until a licence for development works affecting great crested newts has been obtained from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (Natural England) and a copy has been submitted to the local planning authority. Thereafter mitigation measures approved in the licence shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details. Should conditions at the site for great crested newts change and / or the applicant conclude that a licence for development works affecting great crested newts is not required the applicant is to submit a report to the council detailing the reasons for this assessment and this report is to be approved in writing by the local planning authority prior to commencement of works.

Reason: *To ensure that great crested newts, a material consideration, are not adversely affected by the development.*

20. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in full accordance with the Reptile Mitigation Strategy given in Section 5 of the submitted Reptile Survey Report and Mitigation Strategy (Hankinson Duckett, ref: 973.1, January 2021) unless otherwise agreed in writing by the council.

Reason: *To ensure that reptiles, protected and priority species (as per the NPPF), are not adversely affected by the proposals.*

Public Rights of Way

21. Prior the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of the surfacing, sign posts and paths of the public right of way shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details thereby agreed shall be fully implemented prior to the occupation of the hotel and at no point shall the right of way be obstructed or used for parking/storage of materials.

Reason: *to ensure public access in maintained and not detrimentally impacted.*

Sustainable design and construction

22. The hotel building hereby approved shall meet BREEAM Very Good standard unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: *Reduce energy consumption and mitigate climate change.*

Informatives:

1. The applicant is reminded that this approval is granted subject to conditions which must be complied with prior to the development starting on site. Commencement of the development without complying with the pre-commencement requirements may be outside the terms of this permission and liable to enforcement action. The information required should be formally submitted to the Council for consideration with the relevant fee. Once the details have been approved in writing the development should be carried out only in accordance with those details. If this is not clear please contact the case officer to discuss.
2. This permission should be read in conjunction with the legal agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, the obligations in which relate to this development.
3. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received.

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application Number	Proposal	Decision
210233	Full application for the proposed erection of a Greenkeepers building, 2no. water storage tanks, with irrigation plant, service yard, new access from Evendons Lane, boundary fencing, associated landscaping and car parking.	Approved: 24 June 2021

193394	Full application for the proposed erection of 4 no. buildings to provide hotel accommodation, a function suite, a health club and spa with ancillary facilities; a single storey extension and refurbishment of existing clubhouse including one replacement residential flat; erection of ancillary energy and maintenance building with one additional residential flat; and Greenkeepers compound, plus associated plant, car parking and landscaping.	Application Withdrawn: 02 June 2020
F/2011/0102	Proposed erection of single storey rear extensions to club house and functions building.	Approve: 29 March 2011
VAR/2007/1085	Proposed relaxation of 09 of consent 38836 to allow for extended hours up to midnight Sunday to Thursday and 1.00 am Friday and Saturday in line with new Alcohol licence times.	Approve: 03 July 2007
F/2005/6440	Proposed construction of a new teeing area on hole 7. Removal of 2 existing bunkers and construction of 2 new bunkers on hole 7. Construction of a new teeing area on hole 14. Raising of land for proposed tees.	Refused: 25 January 2006
F/2000/2840	Proposed extension to clubhouse and erection of health and fitness club.	Withdrawn: 27 April 2001

For Commercial	
Site Area:	3.54 Hectares
Previous land use(s) and floorspace(s):	Golf Course. Existing Clubhouse: 949sqm. Maintenance compound: 300sqm.
Proposed floorspace of each use:	Hotel & restaurant: 3154sqm. Clubhouse: 2187sqm.
Change in floorspace:	+ 4392sqm
Existing jobs (full time equivalent):	45
Number of jobs created (full time equivalent):	40
Existing parking spaces:	110
Proposed parking spaces:	214

CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Environment Agency	Response advising they do not wish to be consulted.
SEE Power Distribution	Standing advice.
Thames Water	No objection.

SGN	Standing advice
WBC Biodiversity	Further information required.
WBC Economic Prosperity and Place	Employment Skills Plan required
WBC Drainage	No objection subject to conditions
WBC Environmental Health	No objection subject to conditions.
WBC Highways	Further information required.
WBC Tree & Landscape	Objection.
WBC Public Rights of Way	No objection subject to conditions.
WBC Cleaner and Greener	No objection subject to conditions.
Berkshire Archaeology	No objection subject to a condition.

REPRESENTATIONS

Town/Parish Council:

Finchampstead Parish Council:

In principle, the Parish Council has no objections to the application but have made the following comments:

- Traffic should be able to enter and exit this site from Finchampstead Rd simultaneously so there is no build up on the B3016.
- The public footpath should be upgraded

Wokingham Town Council

The Town Council support the application but have the following comments that they hope will be considered to improve the application.

- Solar Panels should be included on the roofs.
- There should be electrical charging points for vehicles.
- Pedestrian and cycle access should be approved.
- Walking from the bus stop is dangerous.
- There needs to be improvement to public rights of way.

Local Members:

Cllr Kerr

In support of the application in principle as it ensures survival of a local business and creates new employment opportunities. There following issues/improvements are however raised:

- The proposal should utilise carbon neutral and renewable energy technology.
- Insufficient electric car charging points.
- There should be a substantial biodiversity net gain.
- The building could achieve a higher BREAAAM rating.
- The applicant should consider modular building techniques.
- Accessibility by sustainable modes needs to be considered.
- There could be improvements to the public right of way.
- A Noise Assessment needs to be carried out.

- The impact of lighting needs to be considered so that it does not impact amenity and wildlife.
- No statement of community involvement.

Neighbours: 15 Neighbour comments received.

11 letters in support of the application which are summarised below:

- It will enhance the area.
- It is not intrusive.
- It offers local employment, keeps the green space of the golf course and provides the local community with a new dining facility.
- The plans appear to be thoughtful and sympathetic to their surroundings.

4 letters objections to the application which are summarised below:

- Question the need for a new hotel (*Officer note: this is not a material planning consideration*)
- Increase in traffic. (*See Para 34*)
- No noise assessment. (*See para 29 – 32*)
- Increase in noise pollution. (*See para 29 – 32*)
- Loss of trees. (*See para 23 – 27*)
- Impact of lighting. (*See para 45*)
- No public consultation carried out. (*Officer note: The application was advertised correctly*)
- The proposal is much larger than the extant permission for a hotel of 13 bedrooms. (*The impact of the proposed hotel is considered throughout the report*)
- There is a lack of capacity for membership of the club and the development will exacerbate this. (*Officer note: this is not a material planning consideration*)
- Insufficient car parking. (*See para 35*)
- The footpath should be maintained and enhanced (*See para 39 – 40*)

APPLICANTS POINTS

The proposals are being advanced to secure the long-term viability of golf club which provides a valuable community asset not just to golfers but also the wider community who use the local footpath network that passes through the golf course. The new facilities, which will be open to the public, will create a range of employment opportunities and will bring wider benefits to the local economy.

The revised proposals have been informed by the site wide landscape strategy with the layout seeking to protect and enhance the existing character and appearance of the site and locate any new built form where it would have the least impact on existing mature landscaping and ecological features, such as ponds and more valuable habitat areas.

In architectural terms, the high-quality extension to the clubhouse remains subservient to the existing building but delivers the targeted enhancements to Members' facilities as well as the new restaurant.

The freestanding venue building is sited away from the clubhouse and adopts an agricultural appearance to respect the wider rural setting. The building and its parking have been set within existing clearings so minimise the impact on the landscape and

habitat areas. Detailed Landscape and Ecological strategies promote both mitigation and enhancement proposals that will result in a biodiversity net gain. Both new buildings are oriented to take advantage of sunlight and views across the local landscape.

All the materials used in construction will be of the highest quality and, where possible, will be sustainably sourced. The detailed design will adopt a fabric first approach towards energy consumption and will target a Very Good BREEAM rating.

All necessary technical assessments have been undertaken by specialist consultants and are submitted in support of the planning applications. The proposals have been assessed against the relevant Development Plan policies and national planning policy provided by the NPPF. It is concluded that in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the NPPF that planning permission should be granted for the development proposals which are of the highest quality.

PLANNING POLICY		
National Policy	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
Adopted Core Strategy DPD 2010	CP1	Sustainable Development
	CP2	Inclusive Communities
	CP3	General Principles for Development
	CP6	Managing Travel Demand
	CP7	Biodiversity
	CP9	Scale and Location of Development Proposals
	CP11	Proposals outside development limits (including countryside)
	CP13	Town Centres and Shopping
	Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014	CC01
CC03		Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping
CC04		Sustainable Design and Construction
CC06		Noise
CC07		Parking
CC09		Development and Flood Risk (from all sources)
CC10		Sustainable Drainage
TB12		Employment Skills Plan
TB15		Major Town, and Small Town/District Centre Development
TB16		Development for Town Centre Uses
TB20		Service Arrangements and Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use
	TB21	Landscape Character

	TB23	Biodiversity and Development
	TB25	Archaeology
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)	BDG	Borough Design Guide

PLANNING ISSUES

Description of Development:

1. The application is for the erection a hotel with associated facilities that will be linked to the existing Sand Martins golf course. The proposal also includes extending the existing clubhouse along with associated parking areas, footpaths and soft landscaping.
2. The Hotel Building will comprise 39no. bedrooms, function rooms, kitchen and staff room, with car parking, servicing and an electrical sub-station. The building will be two storeys in height with a pitch roof that would measure 5.5 metres to eaves level and approximately 13 metres to the highest point. Other sections of the roof will be appreciable lower. The building will be 46m long and approximately 70m wide.
3. The extension to the existing clubhouse will be no higher than the existing roof and would measure 8.3m in height. There is a drop in levels across the site and the extension would utilise this to create a new lower ground floor.

Principle of Development:

4. The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
5. The application site is within the countryside. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy states that commercial development will not normally be permitted unless:
 - ‘1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and*
 - 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings;’*
 - 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement;*
6. The golf course is in situ and it is considered that the proposal would met criterion one of CP11 in that it would contribute to a sustainable enterprise in the countryside. The determination then turns on whether the development would result in ‘excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings’. This

issue discussed further in the 'Character of the Area and Landscape' section of this report. The proposal would technically conflict with the third criterion outlined as the new hotel would not be a replacement building.

7. In 1993 planning permission was granted at the site for: '*Change of use of land to golf course and change of use of hotel to clubhouse and extension to proposed clubhouse and erection of hotel*'. The golf course and clubhouse were delivered in accordance with the permission but the 13 bedroom hotel was never constructed. A Lawful Development Certificate issued in 2015 (reference 152614) established that the permission was implemented and remains extant. Therefore, regardless of whether the proposals represent a 'diverse and sustainable rural enterprise' the principle of a hotel in this location is already established, although the current proposal is appreciably larger in scale.
8. The site is located outside of any designated town/district centre and therefore policy TB16 applies which requires a Sequential Test for all proposals for '*town centre*' uses outside of the borough's designated town/district centres. This is to ensure that the vitality and viability of the Borough's town/district centres is not compromised by new town centre uses outside of these areas.
9. The proposal meets the Sequential Test for the principal reason that the hotel development seeks to complement the existing golf course use, which by its very nature cannot be situated in a town centre location. The applicant has identified other hotel and wedding venues within a 5 mile radius of the site and considers that the main competitors would be other countryside and out of centre based enterprises rather than town centre hotels, which in general focus on accommodation rather than as a venue or conference facilities. The applicant further states that the type of development proposed offers a notably different experience to hotels, entertainment and venue uses within the town centre and would not directly compete with them, preserving the vitality and viability of the town centre.
10. The Planning Policy Team have considered the application and have not raised any objections to the application:

'the principle of the proposed development broadly accords with the current development plan and national policy, the proposals appear consistent with the NPPF's support for the expansion of all types of business in rural areas. On that basis, there would be no objection to the current application provided there are no unacceptable impacts on the character of the countryside.'

Character of the Area and Landscape:

Landscape Character Assessment:

11. The site is located in Wokingham District Landscape Character Area (WDLCA) J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay', which is a large area of rural farmland interspersed with a fairly dense network of mixed traditional and modern settlements. It is described as a landscape of moderate quality. This is due to the combination of moderate landscape character and condition due to some notable features such as the wide range of habitats. There is a moderate sensitivity to the landscape where most characteristics are valued at the local scale of importance.

12. The western boundary of the character area follows the transition between sands to clay, as well as the edge of the wooded areas. The character area attracts a lot of recreation included within this are golf courses which occupy large areas of land by definition.

Design

13. The extension to the existing clubhouse will be a subservient addition to the building. The two storey section will have a design and form that ties into the existing traditional character of the building. The single storey element and new lower ground floor will have a modern design and this compliments the traditional features of the building.
14. The design of the hotel building is contextually appropriate for the site, mixing traditional and contemporary elements. The existing clubhouse was originally the main farmhouse when site was in agricultural use. Historic records show a number of pitch roof barns around the main building, which have been long since demolished. The design of the hotel building utilises this historical context by incorporating traditional design features from agricultural buildings and farmyards such as pitch roofs, courtyard layout, brick and timber cladding. The design also blends this with contemporary characteristics such as large banks of glazing and simple geometric detailing.
15. The main road into the site will remain tarmac but the new tree lined avenue and parking bays will have a gravel finish. The footpath that runs through the site, and to the west, will remain the same and topped with gravel where appropriate. The soft landscaping throughout the site will retain the structural elements of the planting and trees. Areas around the building will be more manicured but will still incorporate more natural elements such as woodland glades, areas of wildflowers and trees to reinforce the existing woodland.
16. The overall design approach is considered to appropriate for the context of the site. The impact of the development on the landscape is considered in the following section.

Landscape impact

17. The proposed development will have an impact on the landscape and the council's Tree and Landscape officer has objected on this basis. The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) concludes however that the effect on the landscape would be minor and landscape mitigation would reduce this further and enhance some aspects of the character and appearance of the area. Any impact would be very localised and would not affect any distant views.
18. Breaking down the effect on the landscape, the impact of the proposed extension to the clubhouse will be negligible. As stated, it will be a subservient feature to the building and will retain its overall character. The clubhouse extension will be partially located on areas of existing hard surfacing and it will not encroach significantly beyond the form of the existing building.
19. The hotel building will be broadly located in an existing clearing in the landscape, which is currently used as an overflow car park. There will be a loss of planting and trees but the main structural planting around the periphery of this area will be retained and reinforced with additional landscaping.

20. The hard surfacing and carpark areas will extend beyond the existing layout. They will be mainly located in existing open areas but there will be some a clearance of planting and trees to facilitate this. The impact of the parking areas would be partially offset by the relocation of the existing maintenance area which was permitted under the application ref: 210233.
21. The site is an existing golf course and the proposal development is located in areas that are already open and/or have been previous developed. The experience from the public footpath would change for the section that runs past the clubhouse and carpark to a more urbanised one, but the enhanced landscape management of this area would have benefits by ensuring the maintenance of the planting along the Public Right of Way, which is overgrown and poorly maintained in areas.
22. Overall, whilst there would be a landscape impact, this would be at the lesser end of the spectrum due to the context of the site and the immediate area being a functional golf course with associate development and maintenance areas. In addition, there would also be mitigation in form of additional planting and landscaping. This is weighed up in the planning balance section of this report.

Trees

23. Arboricultural information has been submitted with the application which concludes that the impact would be of low magnitude. It states that a total of 58 trees would be removed along with 6 groups of trees and that no category A or veteran/ancient trees would be removed.
24. The council's Tree and Landscape officer has objected due to the loss of trees on the site, advising there will be short to medium term harm.
25. The applicant states that at face value it appears that a significant number of trees are being removed but with a closer look, virtually all of them are poor quality, semi-mature or younger, away from the public realm, not making a significant contribution to the landscape or green infrastructure, or a combination of these. None of the main arboricultural features of the site would be removed and there would only be a minor alteration to the overall arboricultural character of the site.
26. The loss of trees would be partially mitigated by replacement tree planting shown on the proposed Landscape Master Plan. The mitigating planting includes reinforcing the tree planting along the public right of way to marinating and enhance the tree 'tunnel' effect; new planting in place of the existing maintenance facility; a line of new trees will be planted along the western elevation of the venue. The Design and Access Statement advises that new trees would far exceed the trees removed, although the exact number of replacement trees has not been qualified.
27. Overall, the loss of trees contributes to the landscape impact of the proposal, but this will be mitigated by new tree planting. The harm would be short and medium term as new planting establishes and new trees mature. It is agreed that the main arboricultural features of the site would be retained and wooded areas would be reinforced by new trees.

Summary

28. In conclusion, the proposed development would result in some negative landscape impacts by reason of the erection of new buildings, development within the countryside and the loss trees & vegetation. This would however be mitigated by significant levels of new planting, trees and landscape management. Condition 5 recommends a Landscape Management Plan to ensure a long-term landscape strategy for the site. This impact will be weighed in the planning balance and conclusion section of this report.

Residential Amenities:

Noise

29. The application includes facilities, such as new function rooms, that are likely to generate noise. The Council's Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection to the proposal given the locations of the buildings and new car parks being approximately 150m away from neighbouring properties.
30. The applicant has not been able to provide a noise assessment due to Covid 19 restrictions and the difficulty in establishing baseline noise conditions. The supporting information states they will '*seek to maximise air tightness, optimise wall, ceiling and roof insulation and if necessary introduce acoustic sound reducing glass to reduce transference of noise between floors and to the outside of the building*'. The council's Environmental Health Officer has accepted this position and advised that given the distance from nearby houses, they are satisfied that condition 13 requiring a Noise Impact Assessment is appropriate in this instance.
31. Noise from externally mounted plant (e.g. for air conditioning and refrigeration) could have a detrimental impact on residential amenity without suitable noise mitigation in place. The application supporting information states that specify plant and equipment to minimise acoustic disruption in accordance with BS4142:2014 and local authority requirements. The council's Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection regarding noise from plant and machinery and has recommended condition 14.
32. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is required by recommend condition 8 to reduce the impact on nearby properties during construction.

Overbearingness, overshadowing, privacy

33. The proposed built form of the hotel block, clubhouse extension and car parks and landscaping would be located approximately 150m from the nearest residential property. There would be intervening features such as trees, vegetation and changes in landform that would screen the majority of the built form from neighbouring houses. The proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on neighbouring amenity by reason of overbearingness, overshadowing or loss of privacy.

Access and Movement:

34. The proposed development would have an acceptable impact on highway safety. The existing vehicle access off Finchampstead Road will be used and this is sufficiently wide and has acceptable sight lines. The development would have a negligible impact

on traffic and Finchampstead Road has adequate capacity. The council's Highway Engineer has raised no objections on highway safety grounds.

35. To meet the council's parking requirements 164 spaces are required and the proposal would meet this, providing 214 parking spaces. These include disabled parking space and 22 electric charging points (10%). Cycle parking is also proposed. Details of the parking layout are required by conditions 9 - 11.
36. The site is located in an area known for its poor accessibility and sustainable transport options. There would be limited opportunities for guest and visitors to access the site via public transport. This impact does however go hand in hand with facilitating the growth of rural enterprises.
37. As part of the application a Travel Plan will be produced setting out ways to sustainable transport can be maximised and this is secured by condition 12.
38. The original application for the golf course granted in 1993 did include a hotel for 13 rooms. Whilst this part of the proposal was never implemented, there is an extant permission for a hotel on the site, although at a much smaller scale than the proposal. Notwithstanding this fallback position, the application has been assessed on its individual merits to have an acceptable impact on highway safety.

Public Rights of Way:

39. There are several rights of way across the site. Footpath 27 goes directly through the development area. The proposal does not seek to divert this footpath but there will be changes to it as a result of the development. The council's Right of Way officer has not objected to the proposal and has recommended condition 21 ensuring that footpath is properly maintained and not obstructed.
40. Whilst there will be crossing points with the access road, vehicle speeds would be low and there would be good visibility for pedestrians and drivers. The landscaping proposed would result in a good public realm for the users of the path.

Flooding and Drainage:

41. The site is Flood Zone 1 where the risk of flooding from rivers is low. There are areas at risk from surface water flooding on the site and on the surrounding golf course.
42. A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted which details the surface water from the proposed development will discharge into existing into the network of existing ditches and ponds located on the site, the same as the existing surface water drainage.
43. The council's Drainage Engineer has reviewed the proposal and recommended approval subject to recommended condition 7.

Ecology:

44. The application is supported by an Ecological Appraisal report which covers an initial overview of the site and consideration of some protected species and species of principal importance.

45. The application site has moderate foraging potential for bats. There was no evidence of bat roosts in the clubhouse although the submitted Bat Survey identified that the building has modest potential for bat roosts. The council's Ecologist has recommended condition 17 to ensure the protection of bats during construction. A lighting strategy to protect bat habitats in perpetuity is also recommended by condition 18.
46. The long-term conservation status of the Great Crested Newts can be maintained (or improved) through compensatory habitat creation or enhancement across the larger golf course site. There are a number of ponds on site that tested negative for Great Crested Newts but which have potential to support the species in the long run. The Applicant's Great Crested Newt report does recommend enhancement across the wider site and conditions 19 is recommended to secure the protection of Great Crested Newts.
47. Condition 20 is recommended to ensure the Applicant's Reptile Mitigation Strategy is implemented in full. Additional surveys for Dormice and Badgers have been submitted and the council's Ecologist is satisfied that the development will not detrimentally impact these species.
48. To be confident of a biodiversity net gain as per paragraph 170 of the NPPF with local policies CP7 and TB23, condition 16 is recommended seeking submission and approval of a long-term management plan for the site, capable of providing a 10% habitat net gain, and applying the recommendations given in the Ecological Appraisal.

Sustainable Design/Construction:

49. The application is supported by a sustainability statement. The venue building will be designed and built to target a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating. The hotel building has been designed to utilise solar gain and opportunities for low and renewable energy technologies have been identified.
50. A BREEAM assessment is conducted in three stages and this application is supported by the first stage called a pre-assessment which demonstrates the rating that could be achieved. The second stage, known as the Design Stage Assessment, will set out in greater detail how the very good rating will be achieved. The final stage called Post Construction Review will confirm the BREEAM rating achieved. Condition 22 is recommended to ensure the building achieves a BREEAM Very Good rating.

Archaeology:

51. The site is within an area of archaeological and historic interest. The existing Club House was formerly the farmhouse of Evendons Farm, and is itself a replacement of an earlier farmhouse sited a little to the north of the existing Club House. Evendons Farm was formerly the manor of Evendons, first mentioned in the early 14th century as part of the Bishop of Salisbury's manor of Sonning.
52. Berkshire Archaeology have recommended approval subject to a condition 6 requiring a program of archaeological work to mitigate the impacts of the development. The emphasis of the program of archaeological work should be on identifying if any buried remains of the original Evendons manor house or earlier, medieval, structures and associated features survive.

Employment Skills Plan:

53. Policy TB12 of the Wokingham Borough Council MDD, requires planning applications for all major development (both commercial and residential) in Wokingham Borough to submit an employment skills plan (ESP) which details how the proposal accords opportunities for training, apprenticeships or other vocational initiatives.
54. The applicant has agreed to enter into a legal agreement securing an Employment Skill plan.
55. If for any reason the applicants/owners bound by the planning obligation is unable to deliver the plan (or elects to pay the ES Contribution) as set out above, they can provide the ES Contribution in lieu. This is based on the cost to WBC supporting the employment outcomes of the plan. The cost to oversee and support each employment target is £3,750. Therefore, a total of £15,000 (£3,750 x 4) would be required in lieu of an ESP on this application. Payment of this sum would be required before commencement on site.

CONCLUSION

56. Considering the planning balance of the application, the benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm and the development is considered to comply with the development plan as a whole and the NPPF. For large scale major development, it is not uncommon to have policies with competing aims that must be weighed against each other.
57. The proposal development would have economic and social benefits by providing enhancing facilities at the existing golf course and facilitation the viability and growth of a local employer. The proposal would create 40 full time equivalent jobs. The applicant has proposed a biodiversity net gain for the site, and this is secured by condition 16.
58. There would be some landscape harm as the site is within the countryside, but this would not be significant due to the context of the site being an existing golf course and close to the envelope of existing development. This impact would also be mitigated by the proposed landscaping and tree planting. The site is poorly accessible but sustainable transport options will be promoted by a Travel Plan (condition 12).
59. Other material considerations such as highway safety, neighbour impacts and drainage hold neutral weight in the planning balance.
60. It is noteworthy that there have been 11 letters of support for the development and only 4 letters of objection.
61. Overall, the benefits of the application clearly outweigh the harm and therefore complies with the development plan when considered as a whole. The recommendation is to approve the application subject to a legal agreement and conditions, the requirements of which are set out at the beginning of this report.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010)
--

<i>In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and</i>
--

maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts upon protected groups as a result of the development.