

**Billingbear Park Golf Course
The Straight Mile
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 5SJ**

PLANNING STATEMENT

January 2026

**PLANNING
STATEMENT**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Planning Statement (“Statement”) is written in support of an application for phased planning permission, submitted to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council (“the Council”) by Billingbear Park Golf Course (“the applicant”) proposing the development of enhanced public sports facilities at the site, which is located on The Straight Mile, Wokingham, RG40 5SJ (“the application site”).
- 1.2. The boundary between The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (“RBWM”) and Wokingham Borough bisects the car park at the application site with the access into the site being in Wokingham Borough. All development proposed within the application is within the administrative area of RBWM but given the location of the access in Wokingham, a cross boundary application is made with the fee being payable to RBWM.
- 1.3. This application is submitted following the submission of 2 requests for pre-application advice, processed by the Council under references 25/90048/PREAPP and 25/90163/PREAPP. Prior to the submission of the application, the applicant has also engaged with the local community and stakeholders.
- 1.4. The development proposed in this enquiry comprises the following:

“Phased development of the site, comprising; construction of padel tennis and pickleball courts (Phase 1); construction of a putting course (Phase 2); and demolition of existing marquee to the rear of the clubhouse and replacement with new extension and construction of a simulator building (Phase 3); together with car parking alterations and hard and soft landscaping.”
- 1.5. This application is supported by the documents listed in Table 1 with the submitted drawings listed in Table 2.

Document Title	Author
Arboricultural Implications Assessment	Merewood
Arboricultural Method Statement	Merewood
Bat Emergence Survey	LHB Ecology
Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment	LHB Ecology
District Licencing Report	Nature Space
Energy and Sustainability Statement	Ecolytik
External Lighting Scheme	Lightsource
Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy	GSE
Ground Investigation Interpretive Report	GEI
Landscape Principles Statement	UBU Design
Masterplan (Rev.01)	Lewandowski Architects
Phase 1 Contamination Risk Assessment	GEI
Planning Statement	4TY Planning
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal	LHB Ecology
Statement of Community Involvement	4TY Planning
Transport Statement	Highway Planning Ltd

Table 1: Submitted technical reports

Drawing Number (all Lewandowski Architct drawings with prefix 2664-PL-)	Title
2664-PL-010-00	Site Location Plan (1:5000)
2664-PL-011-00	Site Location Plan (1:1250)
2664-PL-012-00	Existing Site Topographical
2664-PL-013-00	Existing Clubhouse
2664-PL-100-01	Proposed Site Plan
2664-PL-200-01	Proposed Padel Court
2664-PL-201-01	Proposed Pickleball Court
2664-PL-202-01	Proposed Simulator Block
2664-PL-203-00	Proposed Compact Driving Range
2664-PL-204-00	Proposed Compact Driving Range
2664-PL-205-00	Proposed Clubhouse
6068-UBU-ZZ-D-L-1000	General Arrangement

Table 2: Submitted drawings

- 1.6. Below, this Statement describes the background to this case, giving the Council an understanding of the significant constraints currently being experienced by the Club and explaining why the new and improved facilities are required.
- 1.7. The following sections of this Statement then describe the site and its context; review the site's planning history and the proposed development; summarise relevant planning policy objectives and then discuss the relevant planning considerations.

- 1.8. The Statement then undertakes the planning balance and details the applicant's conclusion, which is that the proposed development represents an exciting opportunity to diversify the sporting uses at the application site, providing important cross-subsidy for the course, which will help it remain viable in the long term. It is concluded that the development will give rise to important planning benefits without any harms arising. As such, it is recommended that conditional planning permission can be granted in this case.

Background

- 1.9. The applicant is the Billingbear Park Golf Course, which is the only publicly accessible pay and play course in RBWM. The site is truly publicly accessible and does not require any form of membership to play, unless a player wants to obtain and maintain a handicap and play in competitions. Indeed, the applicant specifically markets itself as "Making quality golf accessible to all". As such, the applicant only increases its prices as much as needed to remain operational as opposed to increasing them in line with its predominantly membership-based competitors.
- 1.10. Given that operational model, the applicant has to work hard to remain both competitive with other courses in the area and viable given the reduced number of people who play the sport. It is, therefore, essential that they offer the type of facility which players will want and expect to use and that they optimise the financial return from the site, attracting people to use the site, even if not for playing golf.
- 1.11. Another of the applicant's key commercial drivers is to enhance its environmental sustainability, showcased by the following:
- 1.12. Since 1996, the course has planted over 1,000 trees (without subsidy being provided).
- 1.13. Following Covid, the applicant invested in 118 additional solar panels and 30kWh battery storage on the site. This means that 70% of electric for the clubhouse and machine shed comes from the panels and approximately 11,000kWh is sent back to the grid free of charge.
- 1.14. The Club House has an air source heat pump which has helped achieve a net zero EPC rating.
- 1.15. The applicant uses electric mowers (including 4 robot mowers) along with battery powered equipment to maintain the course. This investment has resulted in a 40% reduction in diesel and petrol use at the site.
- 1.16. The applicant brews compost tea to spray on the course, which improves the health of the soil by encouraging beneficial bacteria and fungi, which reduce the need for fungicides to keep the greens playable.

2. The application site

- 2.1. Billingbear Park Golf Course (outlined in red on the aerial photograph below at Image 1) is a circa 34ha course located to the east side of The Straight Mile, approximately 2.5km to the north west of Binfield and 5.4km to the north west of Bracknell.
- 2.2. The course contains the Old Course (a 9 hole course to the middle and north of the site) and the New Course (a 9 hole par 3 course towards the south of the site). The extent of the courses and their location on the site is shown at Section 3.0 of the Masterplan.

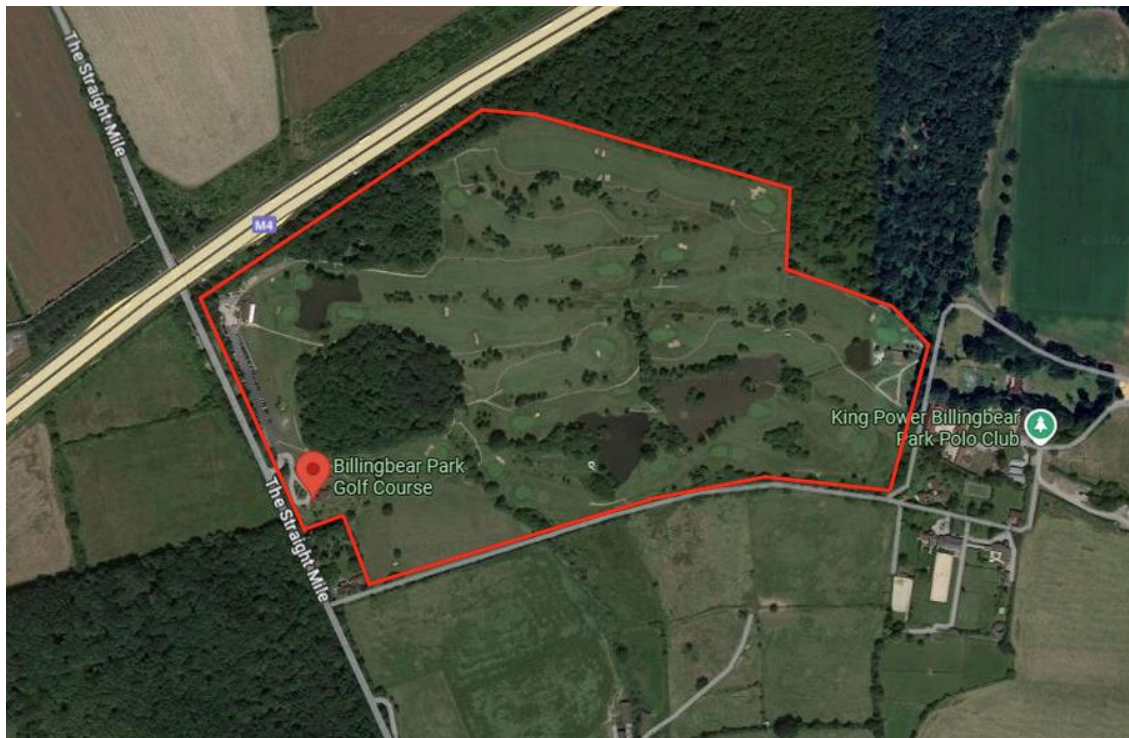


Image 1: Aerial view of Billingbear Park Golf Course

- 2.3. Vehicular access into the site is taken directly off The Straight Mile and this leads into the large car park associated with the course and which covers most of the frontage onto The Straight Mile (albeit at a lower level and screened by tree coverage on the bank).
- 2.4. To the northern end of the car park is the Club House, which comprises a simple single storey building finished in timber cladding with a tiled roof, onto which solar panels have been installed. To the west of the Club House is the course's compound and storage unit, where maintenance vehicles and equipment is kept. The access road then turns east, providing access to a further area of hardstanding (used for ad hoc external storage) and a pair of practice nets.

- 2.5. The proposed developments are to be carried out towards the south of the Club House on open grassland which is otherwise not used for game play, to the north east of the Club House on the hardstanding used for ad hoc storage and within the broadly circular coppice to the south east of the Club House. These broad development zones are shown at Section 5.0 of the Masterplan.
- 2.6. The site's northern boundary is lined by a tree-lined bank which separates the course from the M4. To the west is woodland and Billingbear Park Polo Club with the land to the south being open farmland. To the south west corner of the site is a detached house, Twyford Lodge, which is set towards its southern boundary and separated from the course by its garden and tree and fence lined boundary. The western boundary is lined by The Straight Mile, beyond which is farmland and woodland.
- 2.7. The proposed development sites are within the Green Belt, but are not subject to any other Local Plan designations or allocations. There is an area of Ancient Woodland located towards the west of the site.
- 2.8. Much of the western section of the site is in Flood Zone 2, as shown by the EA's Flood Map for Planning. There are also areas to the west of the site affected by surface water flooding issues.
- 2.9. There are no statutory listed buildings on, or surrounding the site.

3. Pre-application advice and engagement

- 3.1. This section summarises the advice provided by the Council during the pre-application exercise submission and then goes on to describe the feedback received following the public consultation exercise.

Pre-application discussions

Pre-application no.1

- 3.2. In March 2025, the applicant submitted a request for pre-application advice to the Council concerning a series of proposed developments and enhancements which the applicant would like to deliver at the site.
- 3.3. There were 8 principal components to the proposed development, comprising the construction of 4 padel tennis courts, 4 pickleball courts, a putting course, the construction of an indoor / covered practice and simulator block, a chipping course within the ancient woodland, additional car parking, an extension to the clubhouse and staff accommodation.
- 3.4. Following a meeting on 16 May 2025, the Council provided its written advice on 22 May 2025. That advice comprehensively assessed the proposed development and the advice received is summarised in Table 3.

Topic	Advice
Principle of development	The Council advised that in addition to considering the Green Belt implications, attention should also be given to the development's economic and community benefits, including paragraph 88 of the NPPF, Policy IF6 of the Local Plan and Policy Gen 5 of the Hurley and Walthams Neighbourhood Plan. Save for the development of the chipping course within the Ancient Woodland, the Council was broadly supportive of the development in principle.

Trees and landscaping	The Council advised that the proposal to develop a chipping course within the Ancient Woodland would be refused unless the applicant could demonstrate “wholly exceptional reasons” for that element of the scheme with suitable compensation. The Council’s tree officer recommended that other development around the site should achieve a 16m buffer zone from the Ancient Woodland. It was advised that if the development encroaches within this buffer zone then the applicant would need to demonstrate that there are wholly exceptional reasons to grant permission for the development. It was further requested that a Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment is submitted.
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Green Belt	The Council's advise considered elements of the development which are "appropriate" and inappropriate in the Green Belt as well as the case for grey belt development the applicant had advanced. The Council's advise is addressed in turn, below: <u>Appropriate development:</u> The Council agreed with the applicant's assessment that the padel courts, pickleball courts, chipping course, overflow car park with EV charging and the permanent extension to the clubhouse would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as they would all relate to the provision of outdoor sport in the Green Belt in Windsor and Maidenhead. The Council further acknowledged that the location of these facilities was close to the existing clubhouse and car park and would, therefore, be within a well enclosed location with limited (if any) visibility from outside the application site. The Council noted that the earth bunds to the north and west and the tree belt to the east creates a strong sense of visual containment and as such, the developments would not harm the purposes of the Green Belt. It was further acknowledged that although activity on the site would increase, this would be acceptable. The Council advised that the proposed alterations to the clubhouse would be of a modest scale and, therefore, acceptable. Overall, therefore, although the development would result in some encroachment into the countryside, the Council advised that this could be mitigated through a landscaping strategy. <u>Inappropriate development</u> The Council agreed with the applicant that the development of the indoor simulator rooms and staff accommodation would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would be approved only if Very Special Circumstances could be demonstrated. The Council advised that although the development would partly occur on previously developed land, the exception criteria at NPPF paragraph 154(g) does not apply given the overall scale of the building. The Council's concern here focused on the width of the proposed building and the harm it would cause to the openness of the Green Belt.
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	<u>Grey belt</u> The Council agreed with the applicant that the site chosen for the proposed simulator block and staff accommodation could be considered grey belt land. The Council further acknowledged that while the development would have a moderately harmful impact on the character of the Green Belt, it would not fundamentally undermine the purposes on the Green Belt in across the area of the plan. As to the “need” case, the Council advised that this would have to be demonstrated through a Golf Needs Assessment and helpfully pointed to examples of such documents, which could be used as a template should this case be advanced. The Council advised that the site was a sustainable location for the proposed development, recognising that golf needs to be developed in a rural location. The Council advised that the road network had sufficient capacity to meet the development’s future operational needs. Overall, therefore, the Council advised that the development could be considered grey belt development, but due to the scale (width) of the building, the pre-application scheme was considered to be inappropriate development and thus paragraph 155 of the NPPF was not engaged. <u>Very special circumstances</u> The applicant had outlined a Very Special Circumstances (“VSCs”) case with their submission, focused on the potential to increase participation in golf, providing an enhanced facility for those wishing to play but who are unable to play at elite clubs with higher membership requirements and fees, employment generation, integration with local schools and biodiversity gains. The Council advised that although this was a strong VSCs case, it would not significantly and clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. It was explained that if the scale of the simulator and staff accommodation block was reduced, the assessment could be revisited.
Character and appearance	Limited design information was submitted with the first enquiry, but based on the information which was available, the Council advised that the development was likely to be acceptable, save the need to reduce the scale of the simulator and staff accommodation building.

Technical matters	The Council provided initial advice in relation to technical matters such as highways impacts, flood risk and drainage, sustainability, biodiversity and ecology, economic impacts and noise and light impacts and the associated relationship with existing and proposed residential neighbours.
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Table 3: Summary of previous pre-application advice

- 3.5. Following receipt of the Council's advice, the applicant undertook further detailed technical work and revised the proposed development in order to address and resolve the Council's concerns.

Pre-application no.2

- 3.6. On 1 August 2025, the applicant submitted a request for follow up pre-application advice and following a meeting on 17 September 2025, the Council provided its written advice on 24 September 2025. That advice comprehensively assessed the proposed development and the advice received is summarised in Table 4.
- 3.7. The proposal shown in the submission had evolved from that which was shown in the first submission and included the development delivery of pickleball (x2) and padel tennis (x3) courts, the extension of the clubhouse and the construction of the simulator block and the construction of a compact driving range between the padel tennis courts and the clubhouse.

Topic	Advice
Principle of development	The Council advised that in addition to considering the Green Belt implications, attention should also be given to the development's economic and community benefits, including paragraph 88 of the NPPF, Policy IF6 of the Local Plan and Policy Gen 5 of the Hurley and Walthams Neighbourhood Plan. The Council was largely supportive of the proposed development, but advised that the alignment of the footpath access needs to be resolved as it would not be supported within the 16m buffer zone.
Trees and landscaping	The Council welcomed the omission of the chipping course from the ancient woodland and further endorsed the provision of a 16m buffer zone between the proposed development and the protected woodland.

Green Belt	The Council's advice considered elements of the development which are "appropriate" and inappropriate in the Green Belt as well as the case for grey belt development the applicant had advanced. The Council's advice on the various elements of the proposed is addressed in turn, below. The Council advised that in its assessment, the padel and pickleball courts would be appropriate development in the Green Belt as they would constitute outdoor sport. It was also advised that the extension to the clubhouse would be of a modest scale, proportionate to the size of the existing building and as such would preserve openness and would not conflict with Green Belt purposes. As such, this element of the proposal was also considered to be appropriate development. The Council advised that it considered the indoor simulator building and residential unit to be inappropriate development, which would only be supported if Very Special Circumstances could be demonstrated. Given its scale, the compact driving range was considered by the Council to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Indeed, the Council raised considerable concerns in relation to this feature given its 15m height and overall scale, which would mean that it would have a far reaching visual impact. The Council advised that the overspill car park would be appropriate development given its use as an appropriate facility in connection with outdoor sports use. However, officers recommended that it should be relocated within the site. In considering the Very Special Circumstances case provided with the pre-application enquiry, the Council advised that while it is "strong", it would not clearly outweigh the harms arising to the Green Belt.
Character and appearance	The Council advised that the clubhouse extension was of an acceptable design and would be harmonious with the existing building. No design objection was raised to the simulator block. The Council advised that the compact driving range would be harmful to the rural character and visual amenity of the area and as such would not be supported. It was recommended that the development should revert to the putting course.

Technical matters	The Council provided initial advice in relation to technical matters such as highways impacts, flood risk and drainage, sustainability, biodiversity and ecology, economic impacts and noise and light impacts and the associated relationship with existing and proposed residential neighbours.
Community engagement	The Council advised that the applicant should engage with the community ahead of the submission of any planning application.

Table 4: Summary of pre-application advice

Public consultation

- 3.8. In accordance with the Council's advice, the applicant engaged with the local community and stakeholders ahead of the submission of the planning application.
- 3.9. The engagement exercise comprised an in-person drop-in event held in the clubhouse in November 2025 with the exhibition then remaining in situ for a further 2 weeks to ensure that as many views as possible could be captured.
- 3.10. There were 27 visitors to the in-person event with 29 feedback forms being completed across the duration of the consultation period. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the applicant's plans.
- 3.11. Full details of the engagement exercise and responses received are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

4. The proposed development

- 4.1. The proposed development is detailed in the Design and Access Statement and is not, therefore, rehearsed in detail here. However, in summary, the proposed development has evolved from that which was previously submitted to the Council for advice with important omissions, updates and further technical information providing clarity around the development's impacts.
- 4.2. The proposed development includes the following:
 - 4.2.1. Construction of 2 pickleball courts;
 - 4.2.2. Construction of 3 padel tennis courts;
 - 4.2.3. Construction of putting course;
 - 4.2.4. Demolition of existing rear extension to clubhouse (143sqm) and the construction of a replacement single storey rear extension (135sqm); and
 - 4.2.5. Construction of a new simulator and staff accommodation building.
- 4.3. It is proposed that the development will be carried out across 3 phases, initially anticipated to comprise the construction of the new padel and pickleball facilities as Phase 1; the construction of the putting course at Phase 2; and the construction of the clubhouse extension and new simulator building as Phase 3.
- 4.4. Depending on the applicant's needs over time, there may be changes to these phases, but at the point of submission of this application, this phasing strategy is considered to be a sensible and deliverable one.
- 4.5. Alongside the principal developments listed above the proposal includes alterations to car parking arrangements, including the provision of additional spaces in front of the clubhouse on existing hardsurfacing (which in isolation is not considered to be development requiring planning permission); and the delivery of new hard and soft landscaping around the new facilities to ensure the site's rural character is preserved.

5. Planning policy

- 5.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that applications for planning permission are decided in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2. The development plan for RBWM comprises the Local Plan (February 2022) and the Hurley and the Walthams Neighbourhood Plan ("NP").
- 5.3. The Government's policy aims as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") are a material consideration.
- 5.4. This section of the Statement identifies and introduces the policies most relevant to the consideration of this application with the following section undertaking an assessment of the proposed development in the light of these objectives. The below does not address every relevant policy, but summarises the objectives of those considered to be most important to the proposed development.

NPPF

- 5.5. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF concerns the need to support the rural economy. It explains that Councils should support developments which enable the growth and expansions of businesses in rural areas, including through the construction of new buildings and the diversification of rural businesses. It says that Councils should seek to support sustainable rural leisure developments which respect the character of an area and retain and develop accessible facilities such as sports venues.
- 5.6. Paragraph 96 of the NPPF explains that planning decisions should help facilitate healthy lifestyles in inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction and which enable and support healthy lifestyles through the provision of safe and accessible sports facilities, including the delivery of new sports facilities.
- 5.7. Paragraph 98 then makes clear that planning decisions should plan positively for the provision of sports facilities, taking into account and supporting improvements to health and social wellbeing.
- 5.8. Paragraph 103 underlines these objectives, explaining that access to opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and wellbeing of communities.
- 5.9. Chapter 13 of the NPPF relates to the Green Belt ("GB") and at paragraphs 153-160 deals with development affecting the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 explains that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and explains that planning permission for inappropriate development should only be granted where Very Special Circumstances ("VSCs") are demonstrated.
- 5.10. Paragraph 154b) then lists a number of developments which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt, including development proposals for outdoor sport.

- 5.11. Paragraph 155 then explains that development in the Green Belt is also not inappropriate where: first, it would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining GB across the area of the plan; second, there is a demonstrable need for the type of development proposed; third, the development is in a sustainable location; and fourth, where relevant, the golden rules are met.

Local Plan

- 5.12. Policy QP5 relates to development in the Green Belt. The policy defers to the NPPF's definition of what constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as described above. Where development proposals would provide facilities for outdoor sport, parts 9, 10 and 11 of the policy explain that the scale of development should be "no more than is genuinely required" and also requires that buildings are unobtrusively located and designed while avoiding any detrimental effect on landscape quality, biodiversity and residential amenity.
- 5.13. The supporting test at paragraphs 6.18.12 – 6.18.14 accepts that for the continued proper functioning of the Borough's golf courses, the need for new buildings occasionally arises. It reinforces the point set out in the policy that the proposed building should be no larger than is genuinely required and further explains that buildings should be sensitively designed, respectful of the landscape.
- 5.14. Policy IF6 relates to Community Facilities and explains that proposals for new and improved facilities which meet the needs and aspirations of local residents and visitors will be supported. The supporting text at paragraphs 14.14.1 – 14.14.2 explain that community facilities include sports venues and meeting places, explaining that these must be able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable.

Hurley and the Walthams Neighbourhood Plan

- 5.15. Policy GEN 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan relates to community facilities and states that proposals which will sustain or extend specific facilities in the area will be supported. Billingbear Park Golf Course is listed in the policy.

6. Planning assessment

- 6.1. In the light of the matters addressed above and those addressed by the Council in its previous advice, it is considered that there are 3 principal matters for consideration in this enquiry, as follows:
- I. Development in the Green Belt;
 - II. Achieving high quality design;
 - III. Technical considerations; and
 - IV. Development benefits – the case for Very Special Circumstances
- 6.2. Before these are assessed, however, it is relevant also to consider the relevant context in Windsor and Maidenhead in relation to the golf needs and the health of residents. Both of these matters are of central importance to the case and they are, therefore, discussed first.

Golf needs in Windsor and Maidenhead

- 6.3. There is relevant planning history concerning the redevelopment of golf courses in the Royal Borough, most notably the redevelopment of Maidenhead Golf Club (“MGC”), where outline planning permission was granted under reference 24/00091/OUT for a residential led mixed use development comprising up to 1,500 homes, community uses, a local centre and public open space.
- 6.4. That planning permission resulted in the loss of a significant piece of golfing infrastructure in the Royal Borough and highlights the need to support the enhancement of other facilities, particularly those which are publicly accessible.
- 6.5. Although planning permission was granted for the redevelopment of MGC, the application was subject to a holding objection from Sport England, which included an objection from England Golf. In that objection, it was confirmed that the applicant had relied on an excessive catchment for other clubs in the area, meaning provision was overstated in the application and it future stated that the applicant’s assessment did not interrogate the nature of the clubs in the area, including the membership fees charged at some clubs, making them prohibitive to general public use.
- 6.6. Local Plan Policy IF6 concerns community facilities (which includes sports facilities) and it sets out to support proposals for improvements to facilities which meet local needs. It explains that existing facilities should be retained, improved and enhanced with losses being resisted.

- 6.7. In view of the recent loss of Maidenhead Golf Club and the applicant's need to cross subsidise their income in order to continue to provide publicly accessible, high quality, affordable golf, this is an application which attracts significant support from Local Plan Policy IF6.

Health and wellbeing

- 6.8. Paragraph 96 of the NPPF explains that planning decisions should help facilitate healthy lifestyles in inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction and which enable and support healthy lifestyles through the provision of safe and accessible sports facilities, including the delivery of new sports facilities.
- 6.9. Paragraph 98 then makes clear that planning decisions should plan positively for the provision of sports facilities, taking into account and supporting improvements to health and social wellbeing.
- 6.10. Paragraph 103 underlines these objectives, explaining that access to opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and wellbeing of communities.
- 6.11. Paragraph 104c) explains that existing open space and sports facilities should not be built on unless the development is for alternative sports and recreation provision, the benefits of which outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
- 6.12. The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2025 ("the Strategy") is the most up-to-date evidence published by the Council. It sets out a vision that *"Everyone in the borough lives a healthy, safe and independent life, supported by thriving and connected communities."*
- 6.13. The Strategy explains that RBWM is in the 10% least deprived areas in England, ranking 306 out of 326 local authorities. However, it explains that this masks the pockets of deprivation which exist across the Borough.
- 6.14. The Strategy identifies the Royal Borough's weaknesses as including the following:
- 6.14.1. An increasing inequalities gap across all ages;
 - 6.14.2. An ageing population;
 - 6.14.3. Increasing issues associated with emotional and mental health; and
 - 6.14.4. Loneliness and social isolation
- 6.15. The Berkshire Data Observatory holds data for RBWM in relation to various themes including health and wellbeing. This explains that in the Borough, **17.8%** of reception aged children are classified as being overweight or obese, rising to **28.9%** of children in Year 6.

- 6.16. The evidence also shows that only **45.3%** of children aged 5-16 engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous intensity activity per day across the week, below both the South East and England averages.
- 6.17. Turning to adults, **64.3%** of adults aged 18+ in the Borough are classified as being overweight or obese.
- 6.18. It is clear from the Council's evidence that there is a significant issue in Windsor and Maidenhead relating to an overweight and obese population, which does not engage in the recommended levels of sporting activity. Furthermore, there are social issues arising from loneliness and social isolation.
- 6.19. The delivery of new and improved sports facilities at a pay and play facility such as Billingbear can be a significant contributor to addressing these issues, giving residents of all ages an opportunity to engage in new social sports whether golf, padel tennis or pickleball.
- 6.20. The delivery of new sports infrastructure and encouraging wider engagement in sporting activities must be at the heart of the Council's health plan and as such, the benefits arising from the delivery of the development must carry **very substantial weight**.

Development in the Green Belt

- 6.21. There are various themes to be considered in relation to Green Belt policy matters. First, whether the development is inappropriate development under paragraph 154b); second, whether the development is grey belt development; and third, if the development is inappropriate development, whether Very Special Circumstances exist to justify a grant of planning permission.

Paragraph 154b) of the NPPF

- 6.22. The Local Plan defers to the NPPF's definition of what constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt with paragraph 154b) setting out that the construction of new buildings is inappropriate development unless for *"the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land...), including buildings, for outdoor sport ... as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it"*.
- 6.23. Paragraph 154c) of the NPPF explains that the extension or alteration of a building is also not inappropriate development so long as it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

- 6.24. Policy QP5 of the Local Plan further accepts that there are occasions when sports clubs will need to build new buildings with part 9 of the policy explaining that the scale of development should be “no more than is genuinely required for the proper functioning of the use of the land”, this seemingly being the local interpretation of “appropriate facilities”.
- 6.25. Through pre-application discussions, the Council accepted the applicant’s case that the development of the padel tennis courts, pickleball courts, putting course all amounted to the provision of outdoor sports facilities, associated with the existing use of the land and which preserved the openness of the Green Belt and as such they were appropriate forms of development in the Green Belt.
- 6.26. The existing single storey extension to the rear of the clubhouse extends to 143sqm (GIA). The extension is of poor quality design and appearance is not sympathetic to the appearance of the clubhouse or that of the character of the wider site. It is, therefore, proposed to demolish this extension and in its place construct a new single storey rear extension extending to 135sqm (GIA). The new extension would be proportionate to the existing building and would reduce the clubhouse’s impact on the Green Belt than the existing form of development at the site. This element of the proposal is, therefore, appropriate development in the Green Belt pursuant to paragraph 154c) of the NPPF.
- 6.27. During and since the pre-application stage, the development has evolved with the omission of the chipping course in the Ancient Woodland and the omission of the compact driving range, which the Council considered would have a significant visual impact.
- 6.28. The design of the simulator building has also been updated with concerns raised in relation to the simulator and staff accommodation building being addressed in order to minimise its impact.
- 6.29. Having received the Council’s advice, the applicant reduced the scale of the building, shortening its width from c.50m to 42.5m, providing 6 simulator rooms and another simulator / teaching / club fitting room. Alongside these spaces, a staff / general manager office is proposed with the previously proposed 1 bedroom staff flat being omitted.
- 6.30. The proposed block would stand on an existing area of hardstanding and would have a solar array on its roof and would stand to 4m in height with aluminium framed windows with the plans indicating timber clad elevations, which would assimilate well into the tree-lined bank rising to the rear and would relate well to the timber-clad clubhouse building.

- 6.31. The development would not be seen from outside the site and would have very limited visibility from within the application site. From vantage points where it would be seen, the building would be seen in context with other buildings of a similar design and scale, all of which would be used for purposes associated with the existing golf and future expanded sports use of the site. It would, therefore, be seen as an appropriate and sympathetic addition to the site and would not be interpreted as a visually discordant or over large development which harms the Green Belt's visual amenities.
- 6.32. In spatial terms, the building would largely, if not entirely, be constructed on land already covered in hardstanding and as such, there would not be any material reduction in the spatial dimension of openness arising from the development.
- 6.33. Finally, the proposed building would not conflict with any of the 5 purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The development would not result in the unrestricted sprawl of a large built up area; it would not result in the merging of neighbouring towns; it would not result in any material encroachment into the countryside; it would not impact on the setting or special character of historic towns; and it would not impact on the prioritisation of urban regeneration since it could only logically be delivered on this site.
- 6.34. The proposed simulator block has been considerably reduced in scale from that on which the Council first provided advice. In view of this and the justification provided above, it is considered that this building should also now be considered appropriate development pursuant to paragraph 154b) of the NPPF.

Grey belt

- 6.35. In the event that the Council considers that any part of the development would be inappropriate development then the applicant would submit that the development should be supported pursuant to the Government's grey belt policy at paragraph 155 of the NPPF. The applicant's grey belt case is, therefore, considered ahead of an assessment of the Very Special Circumstances case.
- 6.36. Grey belt is defined in the NPPF as follows:
- "land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143."*
- 6.37. The GB purposes are set out at paragraph 143 of the NPPF. Purpose (a) seeks to prevent the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; (b) seeks to prevent neighbouring towns merging; and (d) seeks to protect the setting and special character of historic towns. The proposal's compliance with these purposes has been addressed above and was considered in the Council's first pre-application advice.
- 6.38. In view of the above and the Council's previous advice, it is concluded that the application site comprises grey belt land.

- 6.39. Paragraph 155a explains that development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where it would use grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan.
- 6.40. The delivery of the proposed sports facilities would only enhance sports provision on this site and would not have any wider GB purpose implications across the wider plan area. As such, the development would not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the Green Belt across the wider RBWM plan area.
- 6.41. Paragraph 155b requires that there is a demonstrable need for the proposed development.
- 6.42. It has been demonstrated above that there is an established need for both expanded golf facilities in RBWM to compensate for the loss of Maidenhead Golf Club and a need for additional sports facilities in order to meet the Council's health objectives. There is, therefore, very strong evidence of need in this case.
- 6.43. The delivery of facilities including the putting course and simulator block will appeal to younger generations and those who might wish to take up the sport while also enhancing the facilities on offer to players who currently use the course.
- 6.44. Once need is demonstrated, paragraph 155c requires that the development is in a sustainable location. The NPPF recognises that some developments inevitably have to be in rural locations and it has been established with the Council that this is the case in relation to the development of facilities at the application site.
- 6.45. The development will make the site more sustainable through the delivery of electric vehicle charging points, thereby encouraging players to access the site by more sustainable transport modes. The test at paragraph 155c is, therefore, met in this case.
- 6.46. As the Golden Rules do not apply in this case, it can, therefore, be concluded that the development should be accepted as grey belt development and that VSCs do not need to be demonstrated in this case.

Design

- 6.47. The NPPF explains at paragraph 131 that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development with paragraph 135 advocating for development which creates places which are inclusive and accessible with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users.
- 6.48. The Local Plan Policy QP3 concerns design and requires that developments contribute towards achieving sustainable high quality design in the Borough. The policy addresses a number of key aspects of design, requiring that developments are environmentally sustainable and respectful of the local landscape while creating attractive landscapes and delivering easy and safe access.

- 6.49. In providing pre-application advice, the Council considered that initial indications of the scheme design were likely to be supported but explained that further advice would be provided when designs were prepared and submitted.
- 6.50. The design of the proposed clubhouse extension is sympathetic to the design of the building and the scale of the existing marquee, which would be demolished. The design would be a simple but attractive addition to the rear of the building with glazed twin gables providing extensive views across the course.
- 6.51. The proposed simulator and staff accommodation building would be of a similarly uncomplicated design, which is would be attractive and suited to its future use and operational needs. The building would relate well to the site and surrounding buildings and would meet policy requirements.
- 6.52. Internally, the staff accommodation would provide a 1 bedroom unit, extending to 55sqm (GIA) against a requirement of 50sqm. The accommodation would, therefore, be of a good standard, but not larger than might reasonably be expected by prospective occupants, or required in association with the operation of the course.
- 6.53. It is clear from the above and the justification set out in the Masterplan that the development will meet the objectives of the NPPF and Local Plan Policy QP3.
- 6.54. Detailed consideration to a landscaping scheme for the site will be given once the applicant is comfortable that the Council is supportive of the overall proposals.

Technical considerations

- 6.55. There are a number of technical matters relevant to the assessment of this application, on which the applicant has commissioned evidence. This evidence relates to the development's impact on trees, ecological impacts, flood risk and drainage, contamination, highways and energy. The applicant's case in relation to these matters is summarised below.

Impact on trees

- 6.56. The application is supported by arboricultural evidence prepared by Merewood. This provides the information previously requested by the Council in relation to buffer zone protection around the Ancient Woodland and in relation to other tree impacts around the site.
- 6.57. In the light of the conclusions in the evidence, it is considered that the development will not have any adverse impact on trees and that the Council's previous concerns have now been resolved. The development is, therefore, considered to be acceptable in respect of its impact on trees.

Ecological impacts

- 6.58. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal is submitted with the application, which was prepared following a phase 1 survey. It identifies that there are a number of ecological constraints around the site which require protection during construction works, including the use of fencing and dust screening. It also details enhancements which could be delivered as part of the development, including the use of bat and swift boxes and new native tree and shrub planting.
- 6.59. A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has also been prepared, which explains that no irreplaceable habitat would be directly impacted by the development and calculates a post-development increase of 10.72% in habitat units, meaning the statutory requirement is exceeded.

Flood risk and drainage

- 6.60. The Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy describes the site's vulnerability to flooding and details the proposed drainage strategy, describing that 3 separate networks will be provided to serve the simulator building, courts and the clubhouse. It further explains that the surface water drainage network has been designed to cater for all flood events up to and including the 100-year storm event, including a 40% allowance for climate change.
- 6.61. As a result of the proposed measures, the site can be drained sustainably, meaning SuDS objectives are met.
- 6.62. Finally, flood storage volumes will be increased from the existing scenario, reducing flood risk in the surrounding area, which is a benefit arising from the proposed development.

Contamination

- 6.63. The application is supported by a Phase 1 Contamination Risk Assessment by GEI, which sets out that in its current condition, the application site is not considered contaminated land and given the future use which is proposed, no further investigation is required across the site.

Highways impacts

- 6.64. The submitted Transport Statement considered the impact of the proposed development on the highway and parking at the site. It concludes that the proposal will complement existing facilities and that the planned formalisation of the car park will increase its capacity with highway impacts then being minimised.

- 6.65. It concludes that the additional traffic generated by the development can be accommodated by the existing access without causing unacceptable impacts on highway safety.

Energy and sustainability

- 6.66. The Energy and Sustainability Report shows that the development will adopt a strategy which will positively contribute to sustainable development at the site and in the surrounding area. The measures to be incorporated include the use of energy efficiency measures in the design of building fabric and services, the use of external shading devices to limit solar gains and prevent overheating, the use of efficient lighting and space conditioning controls which sense building occupancy and use, resulting in lights being dimmed when not needed.

Development benefits – the Very Special Circumstances case

- 6.67. The applicant maintains that the proposed development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt. Without prejudice to this conclusion, however, in the event that the Council continues to consider that the development of the simulator block and staff accommodation is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the applicant is able to demonstrate VSCs, as detailed below.
- 6.68. The case for VSCs must take into account the unique nature of the applicant, their standing in the local community and the importance of supporting their sustainable diversification and growth in order to protect the long term interests of a genuinely publicly accessible sports facility in a Borough where other similar facilities are closing down.
- 6.69. As directed by the NPPF, if the Council considers that the development is inappropriate in the GB then substantial negative weight is attracted by reason of inappropriateness. The applicant would maintain, however, that there are no openness harms arising in this case as visual amenity will be preserved and there would be no material impact on spatial openness given the intention to reuse previously developed land on the site.
- 6.70. The development's benefits are defined in Table 4, below, with the applicant's weighting provided on a scale of very limited, limited, moderate, significant / substantial and very significant / substantial.

Benefit	Description	Weight
Health benefits	There are significant issues relating to an overweight and obese population both in relation to children (28.9% of year 6 aged children) and adults (64.3%) as well as identified issues relating to loneliness and poor mental health.	Very substantial

	The proposed development can address these, giving residents access to new and improved sports and social activities.	
Access to sport	The delivery of padel tennis courts will provide an accessible sports facility in the Borough, giving opportunities for participation in sport for young children, adults and older generations while also providing access to sport for wheelchair users.	Substantial weight
Protection of the pay and play facility at Billingbear	The Council has recently lost Maidenhead Golf Club and it is, therefore, important that other courses and facilities in the Borough are protected and supported. This is particularly true at a course like Billingbear, which offers low cost and easy access to high quality sport without the need for membership or a certain playing standard. It is widely recognised that participation in golf is reducing and as such, the diversification of income streams for existing clubs and courses is an important consideration, which will protect the use and will introduce non-players to the game and will encourage wider participation.	Significant weight

Economic benefits	The development will deliver economic benefits through the construction and operational phases through job creation, supply chain support, additional local spend and job creation including, coaching positions and employment in the clubhouse.	Moderate weight
Educational benefits	The applicant proposes to develop relationships with local schools to increase youth participation in golf. The development of the simulator block would facilitate this and the delivery of coaching sessions around school hours, irrespective of weather conditions. The applicant recognises that a community use agreement (or similar) would be required here and this can be agreed pursuant to a condition on any planning permission.	Moderate to significant weight
Biodiversity net gain	The development would have to deliver a BNG of 10%+. The scale of the gain is to be determined upon finalisation of the scheme.	Moderate weight
Flood storage	The development, by meeting SuDS objectives, increases flood storage volumes at the site compared with the existing situation. As a result, the proposal will reduce flood risk in the surrounding area.	Moderate weight

Table 5: Very Special Circumstances

6.71. Based on the above, it is considered that the benefits arising from the development clearly outweigh any by definition harm to the Green Belt.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. This application proposes the diversification of sports facilities at Billingbear Park Golf Course together with the construction of a replacement extension to the clubhouse and the development of a new simulator building. The development will diversify the applicant's income stream, supporting the ongoing delivery of high quality golf which is accessible to all.
- 7.2. This application has been prepared following detailed pre-application discussions with the Council and following engagement with the local community. The proposal has been updated to address the feedback received and has directly addressed and overcome concerns which were highlighted.
- 7.3. The new padel tennis and pickleball courts as well as the new putting course are outdoor sports facilities in the Green Belt, which are a form of appropriate development.
- 7.4. The proposed replacement extension to the clubhouse is also appropriate development insofar as it replaces a lawful extension which has historically been added to the rear of the building. The new extension will be proportionate to the size of the existing clubhouse building and would be of a broadly comparable scale to the existing rear extension, but of a much enhanced design which respects the host building and the character of the wider site. The extension would preserve Green Belt openness and is, therefore, an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.
- 7.5. The proposed simulator block is also considered to be an appropriate form of development (pursuant to paragraph 154b)) insofar as it comprises an appropriate facility being provided in connection with the existing use of land as an outdoor sports facility. The building would be delivered on an area of existing hardsurfacing and would be of a modest scale and high quality design. It would, therefore, preserve openness and would not conflict with any of the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
- 7.6. The Council has been clear in its advice that the only aspect of the development which may not be appropriate in the Green Belt is the proposed simulator block. In the event that the Council concludes that this would not be appropriate then the applicant considers that the development also meets the grey belt tests at paragraph 155 of the NPPF.
- 7.7. Finally, and without prejudice to their other submissions, the applicant has detailed their case for very special circumstances, which is robust and details a compelling and wide reaching list of planning benefits arising from the development and which clearly outweighs any negligible harm to the Green Belt.
- 7.8. The application is supported by detailed technical assessments, which demonstrate that the application is acceptable in relation to matters including highways impact, flood risk and drainage, ecological impacts, impact on trees, landscape design and energy and sustainability.

- 7.9. In the light of the above, it is concluded that the proposed development is policy compliant and will deliver significant benefits. The Council is, therefore, requested to grant planning permission, subject to any necessary safeguarding planning conditions.