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# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 March, 2017

**by S. J. Buckingham, BA (Hons) DipTP MSc MRTPI FSA**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**

**Decision date: 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2017**

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**Appeal Ref: APP/N0410/W/16/3165582**

**Huntswood Golf Club, Taplow Common Road, Burnham, SL1 8LS**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Harvey Shopfitters Ltd. against the decision of South Bucks District Council.
  - The application Ref: 16/01462/FUL dated 27 July, 2016 was refused by notice dated 24 November, 2016.
  - The development proposed is demolition of the existing golf clubhouse and erection of replacement building for use as a golf clubhouse and venue for weddings, conferences and events; landscaping; and replacement car park.
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## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Main Issues

2. The main issues in this case is are:
  - Whether or not the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt;
  - The effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; and
  - If the proposal would be inappropriate development, whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to the very special circumstances needed to justify it.

## Reasons

3. The development plan for the purposes of this appeal is the South Bucks Core Strategy 2011 and the saved policies of the South Buckinghamshire Local Plan 1999 (the LP). Policy GB1 of the LP is broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) in seeking to protect the Green Belt, but pre-dates it. The Framework is an important material consideration and where there are inconsistencies between the two, I have attached greater weight to the approach to the Green Belt set out in the Framework.
  4. Huntswood Golf Course is located within the Green Belt. The appeal proposal is for the replacement of the existing clubhouse, which is a single storey building with a small upper floor element and small outside terrace, situated at the northern extremity of the course.
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5. The proposed replacement club house would be a single storey building with a mezzanine element also to be used as a club house, and to accommodate weddings and other events. It would be set slightly to the north of the existing clubhouse and reorientated with a principal elevation facing south to a large formal garden area, with the open golf course beyond. The relocated car park would sit to the north. There would also be a small basement element, incorporating toilets.

*Inappropriate development*

6. Paragraph 89 of the Framework states that the replacement of a building in the Green Belt is not inappropriate, provided the new building is in the same use, and not materially larger than the one it replaces.
7. While the appellant argues that the 17% increase in volume created by the proposal would not be a material one, the figures provided also show an increase in footprint of 105 m<sup>2</sup> which is 25% over the current clubhouse, and an increase in floor space of 27%. It appears to me that an increase in footprint of a quarter over that of the existing relatively modest building would be significant and that combined with a higher ridge line would create a building which was actually and visibly materially larger than that it would replace.
8. The appellant has not made clear under which circumstances or by whom a threshold of 30% would be applied in considering whether an increase in size would be considered materially larger, and I am not convinced therefore that this is a generally applied rule. I note also the appellant's argument that the increase in size would not be significant in the context of the whole golf course, but the test in the fourth bullet point of Paragraph 89 clearly relates to the increase in size over the replaced building.
9. Although it is stated by the appellant that golf would remain the primary use of the site, the exclusive use of the venue for weddings for most Saturdays during the summer months appears to me to present a potential conflict with times when the demand for the facilities for recreational and competition golfing use are likely to be high. It would be hard therefore satisfactorily to accommodate both uses.
10. The proposed building, moreover, in its more formal design and layout appears to be aimed primarily at large functions, with two large and high ceilinged open lounges and a relatively small bar, situated in a through way between them. The lounge in the appeal proposal would be very small, and set in the north-east corner of the building and away from access to the garden area, while the golf shop would be in the basement. The facilities of the existing clubhouse, by contrast are focused on the more informal bar and lounge area with a view out on to the golf course, and are to a more intimate scale.
11. On the basis of this evidence, therefore, I am not convinced that the proposal would satisfactorily accommodate a golf clubhouse in shared use, and that both the layout and the exclusive use for weddings at weekends, would be likely to reduce its attractiveness and availability for golfing use.
12. This would carry some likelihood of changing the balance of the use of the site from golf club to a venue for events. While the appellant suggests that uses are in the same use class, the use as a venue for weddings or other events

could not be considered to constitute outdoor sport or recreation and would not therefore be a use that was exempt from being inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

13. I note the suggestion of the appellant that the use for weddings would be no greater than at present, and that the use could be controlled by condition to be primarily for golfing. The Council has drafted such a condition as part of their evidence. However it is not clear to me that this can be done with sufficient precision to provide clarity on how the balance between uses can be operated in practice, nor that it could be easily enforceable. In any case this would not overcome the harm in terms of the material increase in size of the building.
14. I conclude therefore that the appeal proposal would constitute inappropriate development for the purposes of paragraph 89 of the Framework. Paragraph 87 of the Framework sets out the general presumption against inappropriate development which, it advises is by definition harmful to the Green Belt, and should not be permitted except in very special circumstances.

#### *The effect on openness*

15. I note the appellant's contention that the design of the proposed building is a considered one, which attempts to reduce perceptions of bulk. Its layout, with two projecting wings, would however emphasise this increase in size over the relatively compact existing building. The roof would have a relatively steep pitch and areas of flat, crown roof, to accommodate the mezzanine element. There would be a prominent, projecting entrance block on the northern elevation. The combined effect of these elements would be a building which would be noticeably larger than the existing building.
16. The proposal would also entail the replacement of simple grassed areas relating to the playing of golf with a large area of formal gardens, including a hard surfaced terrace partly enclosed by the wings of the appeal building which would draw activity outside. This would therefore, in combination with the visible increase in the size of the building, have the effect of reducing openness, which, I conclude, in its large setting, enclosed by trees to the north and east, would cause moderate harm.
17. As the proposed development would decrease the openness of the Green Belt it would also conflict with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy set out in paragraph 79 of the Framework, which is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.

#### *Other considerations*

18. The appellant has stated that a reduction in golf club membership, partly due to changes in leisure activities and partly to the numbers of golf clubs in the vicinity, means that there is an economic requirement to diversify activities on site and improve facilities. I note however that the use of the club has been opened to "pay and play" membership as well as annual membership, but it is not clear from the evidence before me what contribution this makes to income.
19. The appellant has emphasised the need to generate more revenue from weddings or events to support the viability of the club, although he has also suggested that the numbers of these would not differ significantly from those currently offered. He indicates that the increased quality of the venue would provide additional revenue, but no evidence has been put before me to

demonstrate the amount of revenue which might be achievable without significantly increasing the numbers of ancillary events.

20. While the proposed new building might increase income to the club, evidence has not been put before me which convincingly demonstrates that this is the only way to increase revenue, nor that this cannot be achieved in a way which would have a less harmful effect on the Green Belt.
21. The appellant has stated that the proposal would lead to a small increase in jobs in the area, but this benefit would be a minor one.

### **Conclusion**

22. Paragraph 88 of the Framework advises that that "very special circumstances" will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
23. I have concluded that the proposal would be inappropriate development, and would therefore, by definition, be harmful to the Green Belt. I have also concluded that the proposal would cause moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
24. I am not convinced by the evidence put before me that the proposal would be successful in achieving greater revenue for the club, nor that this would be the only way of doing so. The substantial weight given to the harm arising from inappropriate development and the moderate harm I have identified by virtue of loss of openness are not therefore clearly outweighed by any other considerations. Consequently, I find that the very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist.
25. For these reasons therefore, and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*S J Buckingham*

INSPECTOR