

REF MINUTE 31 (PUBLIC QUESTIONS)

Common questions about the Hoylake Golf Resort

1. Who is behind the golf resort proposal?

Wirral Council introduced the concept and the (Jack) Nicklaus Group won the opportunity to take forward the project and build and run the golf resort.

2. What does the proposal consist of?

Primarily a new 18 hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, a new 18 hole municipal course, a links golf academy, a quality hotel and club house, a new link road and quality housing.

3. What stage is the proposal at?

The project is at an early stage, although significant progress has been made in securing the Nicklaus Group to deliver the project. The Council wishes to consult people on the golf resort concept before more detailed design work starts.

4. I don't play golf so what benefits will there be for local people like me?

A wide range of benefits are expected, including 175 new jobs. The project would also boost the tourist economy and inject much needed investment into Hoylake and beyond. It will also provide a new link between Hoylake and Saughall Massie Road, which would benefit the existing highway network by offering an alternative route into and from Hoylake.

5. Is there a chance that the proposal won't happen or is there a firm commitment or legal agreement in place?

There is much work to do but the Council is committed to making it happen. A draft legal agreement is being discussed with the Nicklaus Group with a view to having it signed by all parties in the next few months. This will allow the detailed design work to commence and pave the way for a planning application to be submitted.

6. How long will the surveys and design work take?

It is estimated that this could take up to 12 months to prepare the proposal to a sufficient level to allow a planning application to be submitted.

7. Will people have an opportunity to comment further?

Yes. The Nicklaus Group will undertake pre-planning application consultations and once the planning application is submitted there will be an additional formal period of public consultation as part of the planning process. These will give everyone opportunities to make their views known.

8. I understand that the area earmarked for the golf resort is green belt land. How then could the golf resort plan get planning permission?

The area is green belt land. In their application to the Council for planning permission, the Nicklaus Group will have to argue and prove 'very special circumstances' for the development and show that it outweighs any harm to the green belt.

9. As the proposed site is prone to flooding, how will you ensure the golf resort does not flood?

This detailed technical issue is one that the Nicklaus Group has experience in dealing with. They will deploy well tested measures within the design of the resort to retain and manage the flow of water across the site. All technical solutions will be studied carefully and reviewed by the Environment Agency.

10. What is the total expenditure by the council on this project to date?

The council has invested just under £650,000 on this project, which has been to ensure the initial investigations into environmental, transport and economic impact of the development were delivered.

This investment would be repaid in just the first six months of the development being open, through increased business rates and revenue from a major tourist attraction in the borough.

The developer is now funding all additional studies which the council require, and will be submitting the results as part of the full planning application, which will of course be subject to extensive consultation with local residents.

11. How do you expect this project to benefit the local community regarding permanent jobs?

The current estimate stands at 175 permanent jobs.

12. Is there any breakdown of public feedback from the local communities following any consultation thus far, and are you able to share the results of this?

An initial consultation exercise undertaken over 6 days in 2015 showed that;

- 207 people (33.82%) stated that they fully support the proposals for the Hoylake Golf Resort,*
- 223 people (36.44%) stated that they support the proposals but have some concerns,*
- 182 people (29.74%) stated that they do not support the proposals.*

13. If the project and course are to be run by the selected private group, will the council have any say in how it is run, and will they take a formal share of any profits?

The private sector will take the lead on all operational matters although the nature of the municipal course will be controlled by the Council as will certain other matters by legal agreement for example during the return of the Open Golf Championship.

14. Is there a possibility that Wirral Council may be expected to invest future public funding to avoid the project failing?

No. The project has been independently reviewed and is commercially viable.

15. How will the development impact on allotment sites in the vicinity?

It won't have any impact. All environmental impacts will be considered as part of the planning process.

16. What will become of the footpaths currently situated on land where the resort would go?

Public consultation will be undertaken to seek views as to the future of the footpaths affected. Public Rights of Way are subject to statutory protection. The re-routing of footpaths will be one option to consider where it is necessary to do so in which case a formal application will have to be made to have the footpaths diverted where necessary for operational and public safety reasons.

17. Has any assessment been made of the impact on existing business in the local area, eg. hotels, gyms and cafes?

The developer will be undertaking studies to assess the economic impact of the golf resort.

18. Significant numbers of wintering wading birds and wildfowl currently use the area as a roost. How will they be accommodated, as they are very sensitive to disturbance?

This will be considered by the developer in their environmental and technical studies.

19. How will legally protected species such as water vole, bats and barn owl be accommodated?

This will be considered by the developer in their environmental and technical studies.

20. How will other existing wildlife such as breeding birds, plants, invertebrates, hedgehogs, toads be accommodated?

This will be considered by the developer in their environmental and technical studies.

21. This is Green Belt land: has the Council applied the correct tests to proposing development here? Does the proposed development have to be in this location? Is there an over-riding public need for the development? Are there "very special circumstances" to permit housing and a hotel on this land? No affordable housing is proposed, yet Wirral needs 40% affordable housing. How will this be mitigated?

The developer will have to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority and Secretary of State in their planning application that the very special circumstances test is satisfied. The NPPF states 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.

In relation to affordable housing the current policy requirement would be for 20% affordable housing provision in this location. A reduced level of provision could only be approved where an independently verified site-specific assessment has been submitted to demonstrate that the site would not be viable for housing development at the rate specified.

22. Wirral Borough Council is both proposer and planning authority on this project. How will a proper judgement be obtained?

This is normal practice and measures are in place to ensure a conflict of interest does not arise. The Planning Committee operates independently from the rest of the Council and will determine planning applications on their own particular circumstances and merits in line with national and local planning policies.

Following the submission of any formal planning application, the Local Planning Authority is required to consult the Secretary of State before granting planning permission for the proposed development, as required by the Direction in DCLG Circular 02/2009. If he is minded to do so the Secretary of State could decide to call in the application for determination. Representations received following statutory publicity of the future planning application will be taken into account by the decision maker.

23. Housing is a particular concern as it will bring light, disturbance and domestic pets such as cats into one of Wirral's few dark, quiet areas, where ground-nesting birds live. Where would such houses be put, and how many?

The houses will be positioned on two parts of the site. One plot will be on an island feature and the other close to Saughall Massie Road. There will be 160 houses in total. Their impact will be considered by the developer in the environmental and technical studies.

24. Thorough studies of the wildlife and hydrology are needed. Who will fund these (normally it is the developer) and who will judge if they are properly carried out?

This is especially important if by then we are outside the EU, as the rules in the relevant Directives may not apply, and there will be no recourse to the European Court.

The developer will undertake all the necessary environmental and technical studies for submission with the planning application for the resort at their cost. Statutory Consultees such as Natural England and the Environment Agency will be consulted and representations will be taken onto account before a decision is taken in line with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order.

No further comment can be made as to the possible outcome of the decision of the UK Government to exit the European Community.

25. The nature conservation policy in the draft Local Plan (2012) needs updating to reflect the National Planning Policy Framework. But the Local Plan is already so far behind that central Government has said it will intervene. How do we avoid a rushed bad job on the Local Plan?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will be an important material consideration alongside the emerging Core Strategy Local Plan, adopted UDP, adopted Joint Waste Local Plan and Hoylake Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Council has an agreed timescale for taking the Local Plan through all of the Statutory requirements.

26. Can Wirral Council demonstrate that it has followed the mitigation hierarchy for this site? In particular, can it demonstrate why development in this location is unavoidable given its ecological and hydrological sensitivity?

The developer will have to demonstrate through their environmental and technical studies that their proposal is consistent with the principles of the mitigation hierarchy, both in terms of the selection of the site and also its design and layout.

27. Including both roost searches and activity surveys, pipistrelles and noctules are known to feed over the area. How could foraging for bats be retained and enhanced?

These matters will be addressed by the developer in the environmental and technical studies.

28. As the area is known, now or in the recent past, to support locally unusual and declining species such as greater pond sedge, grass vetchling, meadow barley and various orchid species, how could these plants be retained and/or how would the project create greater areas of equivalent habitat?

These matters will be addressed by the developer in the environmental and technical studies.

29. There are records for good numbers of dragonflies, butterflies, molluscs and beetles, including unusual species. How would these be retained, or suitable mitigation off-site provided?

These matters will be addressed by the developer in the environmental and technical studies.

30. The proposed resort sits on shallow alluvial and sandy soils, which lie over a considerable peat body. Will any fill be needed to create the course, and if so, what sort and where from?

The need for and impact of, any earthworks will have to be assessed and justified as part of the detailed design of the golf course and in the technical and

environmental studies required as part of the planning application process, therefore at this stage it is not possible to provide this information.

31. In view of what Wirral Archaeology describes as ‘the very high number of known artefacts recovered from adjoining areas and the certainty that the area was important during the Roman, Viking and Anglo Saxon periods’ are there plans for suitable independent archaeological surveys to be conducted and, if so, can the results be published prior to any planning decisions?

These matters will be addressed in the environmental and technical studies.

32. What account will the Council take of climate Change when reviewing the Flood Risk Assessment? Will the Council insist that flood mitigation measures should be designed to deal with flood events greater than a 1 in 100yr event, given that we are increasingly experiencing more frequent and extreme storms? How will the Council ensure that flood risk in Meols and Moreton will not be increased should a storm greater than a 1 in 100yr event occur?

Such issues will need to be addressed by the developer in the environmental and technical studies, including a Sustainable Drainage Strategy that will be submitted with the planning application. The details of the planning application will be considered in consultation with Statutory Consultees such as the Environment

Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority to ensure that full account is taken of current national climate change allowances.

The Drainage Strategy and site-specific Flood Risk Assessment will also require the developer to demonstrate, through appropriate mitigation, that flood risk is not increased on site or off site as a result of the development.

33. If the resort is built, the 160 houses are likely to have at least 2 cars per household and the hotel complex & visitors' cars will add to the volume of traffic. This will increase pollution in the area. The Carbon Footprint of this resort will be huge. What assessment of the Carbon Footprint has been undertaken?

National Planning policy requires that new development should be planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. This requirement, including traffic and air quality impacts will have to be addressed by the developer in the environmental and technical assessments submitted with the planning application.

34. The Council have stated there will be a maximum of 160 houses built as enabling development? Will there be any additional flats or apartments?

Yes, the proposal includes 40 apartments linked to the hotel.

35. Has a cost / benefit analysis been undertaken for the project? If so have future costs, such as increased flood risk, traffic issues, cost of the By-pass been taken into account?

The project has been the subject of cost modelling exercises and all known cost headings have been identified and built into the project financial model. Actual contracted sums will not be identified until tenders are received however contingency sums have been built into the calculations.

36. Where can the Council show that it has considered other uses (including leaving alone as a farm) as per Aarhus convention? Why have the Council not considered a Wildlife / Wetlands Resort or an Eco-resort as suggested by the Hoylake Vision Team?

The do-nothing approach is always an option with every project however this was discounted in favour of the current proposal as the Council's strategy is to drive balanced economic growth and to take advantage of opportunities where they occur.

The Council is pursuing a project that provides the best return for Wirral across a number of indicators. That is not to say that other schemes, such as the wildlife / wetlands resort, do not have some merit in principle, it is just that no other scheme measures against the golf resort in terms of positive impact. The developer will commission an in-depth study of all the economic benefits of the resort in support of their planning application.

The Council is very willing to engage with all stakeholders and have recently held a meeting with Hoylake Village Life to discuss the feasibility of the proposals for an eco-golf resort including a wildfowl and wetland centre. This meeting included representatives from the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, the Golf Environment Organisation and "Stop the Hoylake Golf Resort" Group.

37. Why have the Council described the land as "Low Grade Agricultural Land", when evidence submitted by the Wirral Society and the Soil Association suggest that the agricultural land is of higher value? Why do the Council not place value on the land for food production, particularly with the possible implications of Brexit?

The Council does place value on all land uses including that of agriculture however in bringing forward development the consideration is to balance the merits of each use against current planning policies. The environmental and technical assessments submitted with a planning application will be expected to consider the impact of the proposal on ground conditions.

The national classification of agricultural land undertaken by Natural England classifies the land as Poor in terms of its agricultural value. This is just one step higher than the lowest possible national land value which is Very Poor. National planning policy states that where significant development of agricultural land is necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

38. The Councils own study found that over 90% of visitors to the Wirral come for the Coast and Countryside and only 0.2% come for Golf. We already have 14 golf courses, including the World Class Royal Liverpool. What economic analysis have the Council undertaken to show that this is a good investment for tourism?

This development will be a significant tourist attraction given the nature of the resort elements combined with an internationally recognised quality branded hotel.

The benefits of the resort from an economic point of view, including tourism, will be the subject of a study which will be undertaken by the developer – at their cost – as part of the planning application process. The Coast and Countryside offer will remain as important assets which can be enjoyed by all tourists including those that are initially attracted to the golf resort.

39. A recent study showed new roads and By-passes provide little economic benefit, increased traffic and carbon emissions, destroy the environment, put pressure on adjoining roads and are as “likely to suck money out of the local economy as to bring it in”? The By-pass will link to Saughall Massie Road, which is already used by 100,000 vehicles per week. What assessment of the impact (social, environmental and economic) of the By-pass has been made on the West Wirral Area?

The whole project including the new link road will be the subject of a Transport Assessment (TA) which will be prepared by the developer for the planning application. This will be evidence based and will provide an answer to all relevant traffic issues. The new road is not proposed to by-pass Hoylake in the manner suggested.

Should a grant be secured from the Liverpool City Region to contribute to the cost of a new road it will be a requirement to undertake both an Outline Business Case and Full Business Case. These studies will adhere to the Department for Transport guidance to establish value for money and the social, environmental and economic impact of the scheme.

The Business Case approach will show whether the scheme is supported by a robust case for change that fits with wider public policy; will demonstrate value for money; will be commercially viable; will demonstrate that it will be financially affordable and that it will be achievable.

40. Given the inevitable increase in traffic congestion, (both during and after construction) has a Risk Management Survey been carried out into how this will impact upon the building of the new Fire Station in Saughall Massie and its ability to answer 999 calls to Hoylake, West Kirby, Meols and the surrounding environs?

All traffic impacts will be considered in the Transport Assessment prepared by the developer for the planning application and the fire service will be given an opportunity to make representations when a formal planning application is submitted.

41. Will Chief Fire Officer Dan Stevens still be able to reiterate his projected times of arrival in the event of an emergency within the regions?

As above, the fire service will be afforded an opportunity to make representations in due course.

42. Phil Davies promises that this will be an “iconic international project”. What account has the Council taken of the competition from other Golf Resort projects,

such as the Hulton Park project in Bolton which promises to be “the only facility of its kind in Northern England” and “to put Bolton on the Global Stage”?

Wirral Council cannot control other developments or the claims made about their individual merits, however the Council is firmly of the opinion that the resort opportunity in Hoylake is truly unique and of international standing. Competition is inevitable in the marketplace and is an indicator to the attractiveness of the resort concept.

43. Phil Davies states the golf resort will be “a globally significant tourist attraction”, it will provide “hundreds of jobs” and bring “hundreds of millions of tourism revenue”. The golf resort will provide only 170 mostly low paid jobs. There have been no scientific or economic analysis of the impacts and there is no financial business plan in place – so can Phil Davies justify these claims?

Given the nature of the proposal and the proposed package on offer it is clear that the resort will be very attractive to national and international visitors.

Although the number of jobs has been estimated based on similar operations and the experience of the partner organisations, the NJVG will commission an in-depth study of all the economic benefits of the resort in support of their planning application. This study will provide more information as to the wider indirect benefits which will feature in any future assessments.