

<b>No.10</b>	<b>APPLICATION NO.</b>	2016/1166/FUL
	<b>LOCATION</b>	Bridge Farm Dale Lane Northwood Kirkby Liverpool Knowsley L33 3AU
	<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Change of existing pasture land to a golf facility incorporating a new floodlit driving range with covered practice bays and administration office; a nine hole par 3 golf course; an adventure golf course and parking provision. The proposals incorporate a rainwater water harvesting scheme for irrigation with an associated water storage lagoon together with significant planting and greatly increased biodiversity. The landscape works are to be undertaken using imported inert soils approved for use by the Environment Agency.
	<b>APPLICANT</b>	Mrs Helen Ferguson
	<b>WARD</b>	Bickerstaffe
	<b>PARISH</b>	Simonswood
	<b>TARGET DATE</b>	25th December 2017

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## **1.0 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This application to change the use of the land to a golf facility is considered to be unacceptable as insufficient ecological and wintering bird surveys have been carried to determine whether the proposed development would affect internationally designated sites, their qualifying features and supporting habitat. In addition, the proposed engineering operations to re-grade the land are considered to be harmful to the visual amenity and landscape character of the Green Belt. Furthermore, insufficient information has been submitted to assess whether or not a suitable and safe access to the site can be provided for vehicles, HGVs and pedestrians. The development will also result in the loss of high quality agricultural land, and it has not been demonstrated that areas of lower quality land could not accommodate the development. Consequently, I consider that the proposal does not accord with the NPPF and policies GN1, GN3 and EN2 of the Local Plan and as such should be recommended for refusal.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be REFUSED**

## **3.0 THE SITE**

- 3.1 Bridge Farm is located in the Green Belt to the east of Dale Lane, Simonswood. The site comprises of the main farmhouse and a number of outbuildings with 5.7ha of flat open arable land to the rear with a ditch running through the middle. The site is set back off Dale Lane and is surrounded by agricultural land on three of its boundaries. In the far north lies Simonswood Industrial Estate. The access point is located in the administrative boundary of Knowsley Council to the south of the site.

## **4.0 THE PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 This application seeks planning permission to change the use of the land to a golf facility incorporating a new floodlit driving range with 14 covered practice bays and administration office, a nine hole par 3 golf course, an adventure golf course, a short game practice area, and parking provision.
- 4.2 The covered practice bays with ancillary administrative office would measure 58.7m by 8m with a maximum height of 4.6m and would be sited centrally in the site close to the existing farmhouse. A short section of ball stop netting (12m high) is required running from

the southern end of the covered bays down to the line of the existing ditch. Low impact 'berm' lighting is proposed on the driving range outfield. A 76 space car park is proposed in the south west corner of the site close to the proposed entrance and will be surfaced with a wearing course and a grass reinforcement system (grassform or similar).

- 4.3 The proposals incorporate a rainwater water harvesting scheme for irrigation with an associated water storage lagoon together with significant tree and shrub planting along the boundaries and within the site.

## **5.0 PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS**

- 5.1 None.

## **6.0 OBSERVATIONS OF CONSULTEES**

- 6.1 Environment Agency (18.07.17) – No Objections.
- 6.2 LCC Highways (10.07.17) – Traffic Impact will be on Knowsley's Network as the site access and main access routes are in and through Kirkby. I am satisfied that the application will not have a material impact on roads under the jurisdiction of LCC.
- 6.3 United Utilities (17.07.17) - No Objections.
- 6.4 Environmental Health (29.11.18, 09.01.18 & 05.07.18) - No Objection subject to conditions.
- 6.5 MEAS (09.01.18, 21.03.18 & 15.06.18) Objects; Surveys are not acceptable and a comprehensive wintering bird survey is required
- 6.6 Technical Services Manager (Drainage) (21.06.18) - No Objections subject to conditions.
- 6.7 Knowsley MBC Highways (02.02.18 & 06.07.18) Objects on the grounds that it has not been demonstrated that the development would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety and highway conditions in the vicinity of the site.

## **7.0 OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

- 7.1 Simonswood Parish Council (15.07.17) Objects;

Unsuitable development for the area

There are no stated opening hours

Concerns for the light omissions (for surrounding residents at night)

Concern regarding 70 parking spaces for vehicles as it will mean more traffic for Perimeter Road

Main line railway is in close proximity

Height of net may have an adverse effect on wildlife

- 7.2 CPRE (24.07.17) Objects;

Green Belt location which provides an essential separation of the urban areas

It forms part of the Western edge of the upland moorlands of Simonswood, Bickerstaff and Whitemoss moorlands which collectively create a totally different landscape character to that of the adjoining urban area of Kirkby.

Neither the green metal cladding on the proposed buildings nor the high boundary fences are shown on the photomontages of the proposed development.

The application contains an assessment that the arable pasture is graded 2 or 3a agricultural land. With good husbandry it could be restored to Grade 1 MAFF classification.

The scheme destroys the pond and replaces it with two attenuation ponds elsewhere on the site. The pond provide a good habitat and wildlife cannot be expected to thrive in attenuation ponds.

There are bats in the wider area and we consider the submitted bat survey inadequate.

The land raising and modelling by importation of 133,110 cu meters of “inert soil approved by the Environment Agency” to raise the land gives us great concern for two reasons:

a) This large quantity would seem to be based on the fill material necessary to achieve the final design contours of the proposed landform. In practice some 20-30 % more will be needed to form higher mounds to allow for compaction during the construction phase and long term settlement so that the proposed design contours for rainwater runoff are achieved in the long term.

b) The Environment Agency does not approve or apparently monitor the composition of inert soil. The Environment Agency, when it considers it appropriate, “for engineering and other purposes” issues Waste Management Licenses. These authorise the disposal or deposit of controlled waste in or on land provided it does not cause pollution, harm to health or serious detriment to local amenity. The authorised waste is typically demolition material; ungraded rubble, brick, stone, concrete and other waste of various size.

Our observation of similar “improvements” at the golf driving range and practice field at the Beacon Park is that large lumps of stone and concrete quickly appear on the surface as the thin layer of replaced fine topsoil washes into the fill.

Once implemented this development will be irreversible for the site cannot be economically restored to pasture land in the event of the Golf Academy being unsuccessful.

We note that the Long Term Business Plan, section 3.4 of the Environmental Statement is very brief. It does not include forecasts of costs, numbers of users or proposed charges.

There is no justification for either the number of car parking spaces to be provided or the long proposed opening hours of the Golfing Academy.

Golf driving ranges in both West Lancashire and Knowsley have closed in recent years and although the applicant’s aspirations are worthy such a development should not be permitted in the West Lancashire Green Belt but may be more appropriate elsewhere in Knowsley and Greater Liverpool on existing developed land. There are no “very special circumstances” that justify any departure from the approved WLBC local plan.

## **8.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 8.1 Transport Statement
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Design and Access Statement
- Planning Statement
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy (October 2017)
- Ecological Impact Assessment incl Pink Footed Geese Surveys
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Noise Impact Assessment

## **9.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

- 9.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD provide the policy framework against which the development proposals will be assessed.

The site is located within Green Belt as designated in the West Lancashire Local Plan

## **West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 DPD**

GN1 – Settlement Boundaries

GN3 – Criteria for Sustainable Development

EC2 – The Rural Economy

IF2 – Enhancing Sustainable Transport Choice

EN1 – Low Carbon Development and Energy Infrastructure

EN2 – Preserving and Enhancing West Lancashire's Natural Environment

### **Supplementary Planning Advice**

SPD – Design Guide (January 2008)

SPD Development in the Green Belt (2015)

## **10.0 OBSERVATIONS OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION**

### **Principle of Development - Green Belt**

- 10.1 The site is situated in the Green Belt on the edge of the settlement of Kirkby. One of the aims of the Green Belt is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Whilst the development would result in encroachment of this otherwise undeveloped piece of land, the NPPF encourages opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation subject to assessment of other impacts.
- 10.2 Changes of use within the Green Belt are not listed within the specified forms of development that are acceptable in the Green Belt under the provisions of the NPPF, therefore the proposal would be regarded as inappropriate development. Whilst inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the openness of the Green Belt, it is recognised that the physical use of the site by groups or individuals playing golf does not result in any significant permanent harm. The use is transitory and relates to one of the NPPF's aims for enhancing and encouraging outdoor sports. However, the works associated with formation of the golf course and ancillary requirements may result in harm.
- 10.3 The NPPF confirms that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate development. There are a number of exceptions to this including the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation subject to the proviso that they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 10.4 Of the built development proposed, the covered practice bays with ancillary administrative office can be regarded as 'appropriate facilities' for outdoor sport and recreation. The practice bays and office by their very presence, will have an impact on the openness of that part of the Green Belt on which it is proposed they stand. However, they have been sited in a less exposed location close to the existing farmstead and will appear as one group, of a similar scale and design as an agricultural building and will be constructed in juniper green cladding, therefore not appearing out of context within the setting. I would therefore conclude that the practice bays and ancillary office of this scale can be considered an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt which will not result in a significant loss of openness.
- 10.5 The development consists of engineering operations in respect of re-grading land levels, creation of tees, green, bunkers, fairways, waterbodies and landscape mounds along with

a 76 space car park. Some of the engineering works proposed are substantial, particularly with reference to the re-grading of the land and the proposed 76 space car park whilst others, such as creating raised tees and greens and water storage lagoon are less so. These will all impact on the openness of the Green Belt because engineering operations are by definition 'development' and 'openness' relates to the absolute test of the presence or absence of development. However, under the terms of the NPPF this is subject to an assessment of what is a reasonable impact on the openness if it complies with the reasons for including land within the Green Belt and is consistent with the stated aim of planning positively for opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation amongst other aspirations.

- 10.6 In assessing the harm, the car parking for the facility is proposed to be situated in a less exposed location – close to the railway embankment, the road and existing farmstead, and will be screened by trees and hedgerows, therefore preserving the perception of openness of the site. The car park will be surfaced with a grass reinforcement system to avoid a large expanse of hardstanding. The proposed netting whilst 12m high has been restricted to a small area of the site between the practice bay and farmstead. Therefore it is considered that this aspect will not result in a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.
- 10.7 The proposed engineering works to form the golf course will result in a finished surface which is significantly different to the profile of the existing ground which is relatively flat. This significant re-profiling of the land results in an increase in land levels up to 4-5m in some places across the site. The re-profiled area will use existing and imported inert materials that will ultimately form a base for 'natural' growth, albeit intensively managed. In my view, the change in profile will not in itself harm the openness of the Green Belt. The impact on visual amenity will be assessed later in this report.
- 10.8 For the reasons set out above the majority of the proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, will give rise to a loss of openness and, in parts, will conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt by virtue of encroachment. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF advises that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt should only be allowed in 'very special circumstances' that 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.

#### Very Special Circumstances

- 10.9 Under the terms of the NPPF, the overarching approach of the planning function is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This requires consideration of the economic, social and environmental aspects of development. The applicant has put forward a case of very special circumstances on the following grounds:

The facility will be a grass roots golfing academy inclusive to all. There is no existing facility within the local area that currently compares with the proposed development. The proposal would offer a variety of outdoor golf based activities as well as educational activities to the local community. The Adventure Golf course would attract younger children and families to broaden the appeal of the facility to a wider audience;

It would encourage outdoor pursuits and a healthier lifestyle. Golf is a socially enjoyable sport and its popularity is on the rise and 'Activity by the England Golf Partnership' has helped to kick start the revitalisation of the sport;

Significant biodiversity enhancements would result. Almost 6000m<sup>2</sup> of native woodland, creating habitat corridors will be planted, large tracts of the site (18,380m<sup>2</sup>) will be set aside and left to low maintenance grassland, creating wildflower meadows and areas of wet grassland (2,783m<sup>2</sup>) will be established throughout the site;

The development would contribute to achieving the NPPF's objectives of securing a positive use of the Green Belt and support a prosperous rural economy;

The facility will allow schools, clubs and other groups to teach in unique environment which will enhance concentration and motivation;

The scheme would generate jobs in the local area with the future aim of introducing a green space apprenticeship scheme

- 10.10 In considering these matters I am mindful that the NPPF gives weight to supporting a strong rural economy in supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas. In West Lancashire, golf facilities are inevitably going to be located within the Green Belt. The associated benefits arising from direct job creation must be considered as must the impacts to the local economy. I am also mindful that the application site lies on the edge of a settlement, adjacent to the greenbelt boundary.
- 10.11 Therefore, whilst it has been demonstrated that the elements of the scheme are inappropriate, there would be some harm to openness and the development would result in encroachment, given the location of the site adjacent to the built up area and the case put forward by the applicant referring to economic, environmental and social benefits, in this particular case I consider the very special circumstances put forward would be sufficient to outweigh the identified harm to the green belt.

#### Visual Amenity & Landscape Character

- 10.12 West Lancashire Borough Council's 'Supplementary Planning Guidance' (SPG) entitled; Natural Areas and Areas of Landscape History Importance, lists the area as 'Upland Type Mosses'. The checklist section of the SPG, under the heading: 'mechanism for minimising environmental impact', states there is a '*need to minimise the introduction of unnecessary or inappropriate landscaping. Mounding inappropriate*'. To assess the overall impact of the development, the applicant has carried out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which includes photographs from 10 locations with short to medium range views. The selected viewpoints are intended to provide an assessment of visual impact across a range of receptors.
- 10.13 The applicant is of the view that the application site is not sensitive to buildings and landscaping given the backdrop of high raised engineered embankments both along the neighbouring road and industrial complex. The farm complex of Bridge Farm borders the site which is a mixture of residential and functional out-buildings. The applicant asserts that whilst the existing site can be considered fairly typical of the Landscape Character Area the immediate surroundings to the site are very much uncharacteristic of the Landscape Character Area given the site lies on the urban industrial fringe of Kirkby and is influenced by this character when viewed from the North East. Although there is a sense of a more rural character created by the extensive open flat fields and woodland to the north, the southern and western boundaries being of more urban character mean that the significance of the effect on Landscape Character during the operational stage is predicted to be moderate. The applicant points out that the character of the landscape will not change from being open grassland essentially but acknowledges that the form of the landscape will be altered (from a flat agricultural landscape). The applicant considers the

significance of the effect is only minor adverse because the site sits within and immediately adjacent to an engineered landscape (high banks, urban fringe character and human activity) and because the proposed land grading is simple in form (no intense mounding/sharp slopes) and due to the proposed extension and enhancement of woodland on the northern boundary as a result of the proposals.

- 10.14 However I do not necessarily concur with this view. The main cause of my concern lies with the engineering works that would result in significant re-profiling of the land and an increase in land levels up to 4/5m in some places across the site. Whilst I note the rationale for the gradients which include to create golfing interest and to ensure good drainage, the formation of the golf course will bring about a more formal appearance and contoured topography to an area of relatively flat informal pasture land which will be noticeable in parts, particularly when viewed from the Green Belt to the north and east. I have concerns that 4-5m heights is excessive for the proposed development and would represent a significant change and introduce a formalised, man-made appearance to the landscape, with consequent visual harm. The adverse landscape and visual effects arising from the visual prominence of the proposal, when seen within its local landscape context, would be experienced by a wide variety of receptors including the bridge at Dale Lane and the railway line alongside the site, as well as the surrounding green belt which is largely unchanged expansive flat open landscape. In terms of the landscaping, I disagree that the impact on the visual receptors will be diminished by the proposed planting scheme as I consider the landscaping on the northern and eastern boundaries to be inadequate as a buffer and screen to the development from the Green Belt. The Council's SPD specifically advises that 'mounding is inappropriate' within this landscape character area and there is a 'need to minimise the introduction of inappropriate re-profiling' and I consider the re-profiling harmful and excessive.
- 10.15 It must be remembered that the site lies within the green belt and the NPPF at paragraph 81 requires that once green belts have been identified LPA's should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the green belt to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity. The re-grading of the land to a height of 4m or 5m is considered significant and would appear as an inappropriate man-made intrusion in an area characterised by flat landscape. On balance, I consider the engineering works would have a materially harmful impact on the landscape and visual amenity of the area, contrary to the NPPF and policies GN3 and EN2 in the Local Plan, sufficient to warrant a refusal of planning permission.

#### Agricultural Land

- 10.16 Policy EN2 seeks to protect the best quality agricultural land requiring that planning permission be refused unless the development is strategic infrastructure, or development associated with the agricultural use of the land. Neither of these exceptions is applicable here. Paragraph 111 of the NPPF encourages the effective use of land by reusing brownfield land provided that it is not of high environmental quality, and paragraph 112 indicates that significant development of agricultural land should be shown to be necessary and, where this is demonstrated, areas of poorer quality land should be used in preference to that of higher quality.
- 10.17 The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of England and Wales provides a framework for classifying land according to the extent to which its physical or chemical characteristics impose long term limitations on agricultural use. The principle physical factors together with interactions between them form the basis for classifying land into one of five grades; Grade 1 land being of excellent quality through to Grade 5 land of very poor quality. Grades 1, 2 and 3a are considered to be the best and most versatile (BMV).

- 10.18 The ALC shows the northern part of the development site is classified as Grade 1 (excellent) with the southern part of the site classified as 'Urban'. However the Agricultural Land Classification maps were published in the 1980's, take a broad brush approach and are not considered to be wholly reliable at a site specific level. Therefore an Agricultural Land Classification report has been submitted by the applicant which concludes that the land is of a lower grade. The land to the west of the existing central ditch is classified as subgrade 3a while the land to the east of the ditch is classified as grade 2. However the report confirms the site remains Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.
- 10.19 The submitted ALC report confirms that the engineering works would involve the stripping, storing and replacement of topsoil and subsoil on site but would also include the importation of recycled Environment Agency approved inert soils and subsoils (133,110m<sup>3</sup>) to allow for the raising of land levels and land remodelling. The supporting statement states that these would be EA approved imported soils and that it would be possible to restore soil profiles that are of a similar ALC grade to those prior to works. In this way the applicant contends that the loss of best and most versatile land would be minimised. I do not concur with this view.
- 10.20 In accordance with Government guidance in the NPPF and NPPG, the first consideration should be whether or not the use of agricultural land is necessary. This exercise should demonstrate that no suitable brownfield land or non-agricultural land is available within a reasonable search area. The NPPF also requires consideration of other sites with poorer quality agricultural land. There is no national or local guidance when defining a study area and each case should be considered on its own merits taking into account both planning and operational constraints. This would require the consideration of alternative sites not just within West Lancashire but also within the Borough of Knowsley. The proposed development does not comply with the paragraph 112 NPPF or NPPG in that the applicant has failed to demonstrate that the use of a lower grade of agricultural land is not possible, and details of a sequential site search have not been submitted as part of this application. Therefore I cannot conclude that the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land is justified, and the proposal is therefore contrary to both the NPPF and Policy EN2 of the Local Plan.

#### Impact on Trees

- 10.21 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has been submitted as five groups of low value trees are to be removed as part of the development proposals. Whilst I have no objection to the removal of these trees I am concerned over the re-grading of the land, particularly near the boundaries and the potential impact upon the existing trees and hedges which are to be retained as part of the proposals. In an attempt to address this the applicant has advised that the raising of the ground levels or soil piling would take place outside the root protection area for the trees which are to remain in situ.
- 10.22 Whilst the majority of trees and hedges on the boundary will be retained, a landscape planting scheme has been submitted with the application that includes key woodland block planting on the south and south east boundaries. A replacement hedgerow for the fragmented hedgerow lost on the northern boundary is also proposed. The proposed landscaping scheme is in accordance with Council policy, however, I would like to see further planting around the area proposed for car parking and along the northern and eastern boundaries of the driving range outfield. These areas are very exposed when viewed from the higher road elevation and surrounding green belt as it is flat and open. Were the scheme to be considered acceptable in principle, I would require the landscaping scheme to be modified to address this issue.



## Impact on adjacent land uses

- 10.23 Given the distance of the main activity area from neighbouring sensitive properties the main impacts are anticipated as those arising from traffic entering and leaving the site and the noise and light associated with the use of the practice range, adventure golf course and 9 hole golf course.
- 10.24 Noise aspects include playing (golf ball drives) and maintenance of the practice outfield, adventure golf course and 9 hole golf course. The whole site is a considerable distance away from residential properties, the nearest being the adjacent farm at over 200m away and so it is expected that noise levels from golf play itself would not be at a level to cause disturbance to nearby dwellings. The mechanical ball collection and electrically powered ball cleaning equipment along with the regular grass cutting may give rise to some noise, however, subject to controlled hours of operation it is not considered that any significant noise nuisance would arise to the nearest residential occupiers.
- 10.25 Low impact 'berm' lighting is proposed on the outfield and a light assessment shows the vertical illuminance levels for surrounding properties, including The Cottage on Dale Lane which is directly in line of sight to the practice range and also Southend and Woods Farms and properties on Shacklady Road and Warrenhouse Road. I have sought the advice of the Environmental Health Officer who is satisfied that the lighting design demonstrates that the lighting would not cause significant disturbance to nearby residents.
- 10.26 There is considerable potential for noise and dust to be an issue during the construction phases of this project, both with deliveries of soil and construction of the landscaping on site. The application suggests that during the construction phase there could be on average 130 HGV trips a day. Conditions could be imposed to ensure the route HGVs take to arrive at the site avoids, where possible, residential areas and to ensure HGV arrivals are spaced throughout the day. HGVs tipping on site and onsite construction activities with the tipped soil are also likely to be noisy. The accompanying noise assessment states that noise levels at the nearest residential properties will not exceed 55dB LAeq(1hr) which the Environmental Health Officer considers acceptable.
- 10.27 No other direct adverse impacts on surrounding land uses are anticipated. In summary, subject to appropriate working practises and vehicle routing, which could be secured via planning condition, I consider the development would accord with the requirements of Policy GN3 in the Local Plan.

## Impact on Ecology

- 10.28 The site lies close to an identified area of supporting habitat to a Natura 2000 site within West Lancashire and adjoining Merseyside Authority areas, primarily designated as such due to the use of the area as feeding grounds for pink footed geese.
- 10.29 MEAS have been consulted and are of the view that although a Wintering Bird Survey accompanies the application it is limited and fails to assess the potential effects of the proposals on non-breeding birds nor consider the impacts of floodlighting on the Simonswood Moss (pink footed goose) roost, flight lines and adjacent fields. The submitted wintering bird survey also fails to follow the best practice methods, only includes the immediate site and not the wider buffer area, and does not cover the entire non-breeding bird period which is September – April inclusive. The survey only covers the months of January – March and omits the autumn passage, which misses the peak in pink-footed geese numbers in October.
- 10.30 The applicant has also submitted an Ecological Impact Assessment and MEAS are not

satisfied that the survey has been carried out adequately as incorrect guidelines have been used and therefore MEAS are unable to assess the impact of the proposal on protected species.

- 10.31 In summary, the submitted ecology surveys are considered to be insufficient and do not adequately establish the significance of any impacts on these habitats and the bird species using them and flight lines between the areas, particularly in relation to pink footed geese. Therefore, there is currently insufficient information to allow the Council to complete a Habitat Regulations Assessment and fulfil its duty as a Competent Authority insofar as it is unable to determine the potential impact of the proposal on non-breeding birds including pink footed goose and whooper swan. The proposed development therefore fails to comply with the requirements of the NPPF and to Policy EN2 in the Local Plan.

#### Highway Safety

- 10.32 It is proposed to utilise the current Bridge Farm access from Dale Lane to access the proposed facility. The site access and main access routes are under Knowsley Council's control, therefore Knowsley Council as Highway Authority have been consulted and have expressed concern about the access point. One of the concerns relates to access by HGVs approaching from the north west of the site being unable to turn into the site without taking up the whole width of the opposing lane. The applicant has confirmed that all construction traffic will be routed to the site from the south. However, the Highway Authority is concerned this is insufficient to mitigate the concern and a control to inhibit a left turn approaching from the north would be required. Prior to the determination of the application achievable solutions would need to be put forward to ensure a left hand manoeuvre into the site is prohibited along with revised swept path analysis.
- 10.33 In addition the Highway Authority is concerned that the access road is too narrow to allow for two vehicles to pass, therefore the applicant submitted a revised sketch showing the access road widened to 5.5m. However, a further swept path analysis is required taking into account the proposed revisions including radii changes to show that there will be no conflict between vehicles passing at all points accessing and egressing the site, from Dale Lane into and including the car park entrance. Due to the above concerns the Highway Authority is of the view that consideration should be given to moving the proposed access either as a construction phase option (with subsequent reinstatement) and/or a permanent new access provision location/configuration to the proposed site. The Highway Authority is also concerned that the exit position from the car park is too tight to the boundary of the adjacent residential property thus reducing visibility and as such the exit point may need to be moved away from the boundary. In response the applicant has confirmed in writing that a 3m radii is proposed for drivers exiting, however a visibility splay diagram would be required before the Highway Authority could support this solution.
- 10.34 Another concern highlighted by the Highway Authority relates to the lack of pedestrian footpaths entering and exiting the site. The applicant has confirmed that the proposed access road will be shared with pedestrians although they anticipate pedestrian movements will be minimal due to the type of development. However, in order to allow for pedestrians (some may have trolleys or be carrying golf bags) to cross Dale Lane safely the Highway Authority requires an inline pedestrian crossing point to be constructed close to the access point. In addition a footpath will be required along the access point to ensure pedestrians can safely access the development.
- 10.35 It is considered that the golf facility itself will have a negligible impact on traffic flows in the area and it is anticipated that it will generate a maximum of 25 two way trips during the busiest evening peak (5pm - 6pm). A 76 space car park is proposed in the south west

corner of the site close to the proposed entrance and will be surfaced with a wearing course and a grass reinforcement system which is considered to be acceptable.

- 10.36 The main traffic impact will be from the construction phase and as such Traffic Impact Assessment has been undertaken covering both the construction and operational phases of the development. The temporary construction of the development involves the transportation of the inert material to the site from designated landfill sites. It is estimated 133,110m<sup>3</sup> of inert materials are to be transported to the site using HGVs carrying an average of 8m<sup>3</sup> per delivery. Over a 24 month construction period this would result in a maximum of 6 additional HGV vehicle trips during the AM and PM peak hours with a total daily increase of 64 two way trips. To ensure that the numbers of HGVs on the local highway network does not significantly increase the Highway Authority would recommend this is controlled by condition.
- 10.37 In summary, the proposed development conflicts with Policy GN3 of the Local Plan as insufficient information has been submitted to assess whether or not a suitable and safe access to the site for vehicles, HGVs and pedestrians, can be provided to enable the Local Planning Authority to be satisfied that the development would not have a detrimental effect on highway safety in the immediate surrounding area.

#### Flood Risk and Impact on Drainage

- 10.38 The site is located in Flood Zone 1, an area considered to have the lowest probability of fluvial and tidal flooding. A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy accompanies the application which embraces the concept of sustainable drainage and recognises that flood risk is an important aspect of the development proposals. The site is currently permeable due to its greenfield status however the scheme would introduce hard standing which would result in an increase in surface water run off rates and volumes. The imported subsoil would provide additional storage for infiltration and retain the greenfield drainage characteristics. A detention basin in the lower northern extent of the site would be incorporated and water within the basin would be used for irrigation. Any run off from hardstanding, buildings and landscaped areas would be directed towards the basin over ground in designated conveyance channels. Any water that does not infiltrate or get reused through irrigation would discharge to Simonswood Brook at a limited discharge rate of 12.3 l/s. In order to achieve this attenuation storage would be required.
- 10.39 In respect of foul drainage, as the development site is not within an area served by mains drainage, a private package treatment plant would be utilised for foul drainage. Treated effluent would be discharged to a drainage field or alternatively discharged to the surface water drainage network onsite.
- 10.40 I am satisfied the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy provides sufficient information to ensure the scheme would not increase flood risk in the locality. A condition could be imposed to secure a submission of a detailed drainage design including attenuation volumes and survey work to confirm connectivity of the land drain to the wider river network, to ensure that the development would comply with policy GN3 in the Local Plan.

### **11.0 DEPARTURE APPLICATION**

- 11.1 This proposal is a Departure from the Development Plan in that it involves a development normally inappropriate in the Green Belt. The application should, therefore be referred to the Secretary of State if the Council were mindful to grant approval.

### **12.0 CONCLUSION**

- 12.1 The development would result in harm to the visual amenity and landscape character of this part of the Green belt and result in loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. Furthermore it has not been demonstrated that the development would not be detrimental to ecology or highway safety. Therefore it is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reasons:

### **Reasons for Refusal**

1. The proposed development conflicts with paragraph 118 of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and Policy EN2 of the West Lancashire Local Plan Development Plan Document 2012-2027 in that insufficient information has been provided to demonstrate that the proposed development would not adversely affect internationally designated sites, their qualifying features and supporting habitat.
2. By virtue of their height and scale the proposed engineering operations to re-grade the land would be harmful to the visual amenity and landscape character of this part of the Green Belt contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, Policies GN3 and EN2 of the West Lancashire Local Plan Development Plan Document 2012-2027 and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance "Natural Areas and Areas of Landscape History Importance".
3. The proposed development conflicts with Policy GN3 of the West Lancashire Local Plan (2012-2027) DPD in that insufficient information has been submitted to assess whether or not a suitable and safe access to the site can be provided for vehicles, HGVs and pedestrians to enable the Local Planning Authority to be satisfied that the development would not have a detrimental effect on highway safety in the immediate surrounding area.
4. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the development of agricultural land is necessary nor has it been demonstrated that sites of lower agricultural quality are not available. Consequently the development does not comply with the sequential test set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance and therefore the proposal is not in accordance with government guidance in this respect and is contrary to paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework.