

19/02870/FUL

I object to this proposal.

The land in question forms part of the open countryside that surrounds Bedlington. The vista approaching the town would depreciate significantly with the removal of this open space whilst the wildlife would suffer with the removal of habitats and the much cited wildlife corridor. GP1 (settlement limits) and REC1 (strategically important parks and open spaces).

Indeed the emerging Local Plan at NCC and the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan both recognise this area as one of importance as outside of the settlement boundary (NLP - policy STP1), Protected Open Space while a covenant is on the land that it must remain as leisure land.

On passing approval for the neighbouring Acres estate NCC stipulated the condition that:

*21. Prior to the commencement of the development, full details of a safety net to prevent golf balls from the neighbouring golf practice area entering the site from the west shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include exact siting, materials, full dimensions and a maintenance plan for the net. The safety net shall be installed as approved thereafter.*

Whilst the applicant claims *'the current driving range is close to the recent housing to the north of the golf club car park. This has presented safety issues during operation from wayward drives. Safety netting was installed to the perimeter when this became evident, but this has had only limited success and a permanent solution needs to be implemented'* and that the land is unsuitable for use, there is no indication that this is correct, nor any evidence that correct use of the current green (ie taking shots from the West of the site) has led to damage to homes.

The current net height of around 15-20ft is substantially lower than at other sites around neighbouring sports facilities, including those in Bedlington, and indeed on investigating 'lattice frame tower' netting, used next to motorways and in busy urban areas, to provide these on the current green site could be erected for less than the price of a set of professional clubs. Should there not be a reasonable solution to shots going awry, then the new development would also bear a safety risk to traffic on the A1068 which parallels the quarry site earmarked for the new range.

The current driving range, ultimately can be used in it's current guise and should any further action be needed, these can be quickly and cheaply remedied and therefore this is not a reason to lose Protected Open Space.

Should further evidence be needed that this Protected Open Space should not be developed, please can members refer to the Public Protection comments, with regards to lighting and contamination. Whilst the area for homes falls under land from the opencast, the Quarry site set aside for the new range, is sited directly on top of a landfill site. The Quarry in question was the site of unregulated landfill up to the 1970s, where it was well known locally that both chemicals and potential

carcinogens were dumped. Indeed, well before this development was under discussion, local knowledge, including that from those who used the site as a dump, would joke that 1,000s of bottles of mislabelled perfume were one of the items dumped on the site, yet no one dared to go and try and retrieve any. Whilst the site is buried and stable at present, there is much concern that disrupting this land could have a damaging effect on the local area, the development and the club itself. Without intensive investigations this could be a serious health hazard.

Finally, with regards to both the driving range and the wildlife corridor that runs through the practice green, these areas are areas of ecological importance to the town. When the Acres site was built, concerns about the wildlife corridor were countered with the practice green remaining to sustain this. Additionally, comments with regards to wildlife around the site significantly undervalue the habitats on the site, particularly those of great crested newts, bats and red squirrels. Whilst Bedlington Golf Club representatives have previously claimed that they have been 'fully supported by the Red Squirrel Society', such an organisation does not exist while local groups have expressed opposition alongside disappointment that they have been courted for support of the club while not being made aware of the plans for the removal of habitats. In the last area of substantial woodland before the town, it is vital that this remains.