

# Committee Presentation

**Date:** 03 November 2020

**Reference No.:** 19/02870/FUL

**Proposal:** Erection of 49 dwellings on site of former driving range, relocation and construction of 24 bay, floodlit, all weather driving range and visitor facility, creating 'Centre of Excellence', Clubhouse refurbishment/extension and new community function room (amended 04/05/2020)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this application on behalf of Bedlingtonshire Golf Club. The Club are grateful for the overwhelming support for the application, recognising the significant benefits that this scheme will deliver for the residents of Bedlington.

This proposal came about due to the development by Miller Homes of housing at the end of the existing Driving Range. This practice facility has now become a substantial Health and Safety risk and has reduced the capability of the facility and has required the introduction of a full "Risk Assessment" and yardage restrictions imposed on the field. However, the risk of golf balls encroaching the properties has not been eradicated with two incidents of property damage to date. The loss of the current Driving Range has put the Club at a massive disadvantage to other clubs.

As Members have heard, the Golf Club land is allocated as Recreational Land. This development will ensure that an important recreational open space is safeguarded and provides improved facilities to be used by members and residents of Bedlington. Emerging Policy states that developments on open space will be supported where they would be replaced by an area of equivalent or better quality. The new Driving Range within the existing wood will be a significant improvement on the current facilities, with the wood replanted off site.

The proposed development will enable Bedlingtonshire Golf Club to invest in the Clubs' long term sustainability, which has become an even greater concern due to COVID-19 and the recent announcement of further lockdown measures.

Significant investment is required to relocate the driving range and provide community facilities that can generate an ongoing income stream for the Club. Private sector funding is the only way of guaranteeing delivery of these projects. The only realistic opportunity to deliver the proposed improvements is from the capital receipt from the proposed housing development, as has happened at Blyth Golf Club. The long term benefit has been demonstrated within the Business Plan submitted with the application, showing that the monies raised in the sale will be fully re-invested into the Club and the Community.

The new visitor centre next to the Driving Range will provide modern facilities and allow the Club to develop a Centre of Excellence. As part of the visitor facility, the development also proposes a bistro style café which would be available for the range users, local walking/cycling groups and members of the public.

The refurbishment of the Clubhouse will create a new Community Function Room, a space which is lacking within Bedlington. The proposals include a new 'Spike Bar' which would be for members to use, thus freeing up the Clubhouse for public hire. The community space could be hired for social events including weddings, funerals and christenings. As members will know, there are currently very few venues in Bedlington which can offer space for these events. The space will also be utilised by local community groups to host meetings and classes, such as slimming world or health classes.

As well as the social benefits, there are a range of economic benefits associated with the development, including new jobs at the Golf Club. Housebuilding also brings direct economic benefits to the area. There will be jobs and training opportunities for locals during the construction phase of development and secondary jobs created through the increased expenditure of new residents.

The technical issues have been fully assessed and have informed the detailed layout that is before you today. We have worked with Council Officers to ensure that all of the technical issues have been resolved, and the outstanding issues identified in the refusal reasons can be resolved with the signing of a Section 106 Planning Agreement and planning conditions. During discussions with the Planning Team we have agreed to the following:

1. Delivery of 8 affordable houses;
2. Local Highway improvements;
3. Contribution to coastal mitigation, and;
4. Off-site woodland replanting.

To conclude, the proposed residential development will ensure the delivery of new and improved recreational and community facilities which would address existing health and safety risks, which cannot be overcome on the existing Driving Range. This amounts to 'special circumstances' with the benefits of the proposed development outweighing the harm caused by the relocation of recreational open space. This is a material consideration which should be fully considered in the planning balance.

We therefore respectfully request that members approve the application before them, subject to agreeing a Section 106 Planning Agreement and planning conditions.

Thank you.

[Words 749/750]