

Planning Inspectorate Appeal Ref: APP/Q1825/W/24/3350905

Regarding Planning Application Reference 21/01830/FUL relating to:

Land West of Hither Green Lane Redditch, Worcestershire

**Main Proof of Evidence on Golf Matters
from Mark Anthony Smith BA MRICS MBA**

3 January 2025

1. **My professional experience**

1.1 My name is Mark Anthony Smith.

1.2 I have been a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors ('RICS') since 1991 and I am a RICS Registered Valuer.

1.3 For the last 33 years I have specialised solely in the UK golf property sector.

1.4 I provide advice to a wide range of clients on golf related property and business matters. My clients include golf venue operators, freehold investors, local authorities, banks, surveying firms needing specialist golf advice, lawyers, and accountants.

1.5 My firm is called 'Smith Leisure'. I attached in Appendix MAS 1 some background information on myself and my firm.

1.6 I regularly comment and advise on the topics of golf need and economic viability in various professional work contexts.

1.7 *Planning inquiry work:* I act for both local planning authorities and appellants. I have given golf related expert evidence at the following planning inquiries:

- Ingol Golf Course in Preston, Lancashire (two separate inquiries) – an existing 18-hole proprietary golf course aimed at the mid to lower end of the market (on behalf of the local planning authority in 2011 and 2016).
- Cherry Lodge Golf Club in Kent – an existing 18-hole 'mid-market' private members' golf club founded in 1969 (on behalf of the appellant in 2012).
- The Dye London (now renamed 'The Legacy Club') in north-west London – a proposed 18-hole proprietary course of 'international standing' (on behalf of the appellant in 2017).
- The proposed Hertford Golf Club in Hertfordshire – an 18-hole 'open to all' proprietary golf course (on behalf of the appellant in 2019).
- Widnes Golf Club in Widnes, Cheshire – an existing 100 year old 18-hole private members' club (on behalf of the local planning authority in 2022).
- Godstone Golf Course in Surrey – a 9-hole proprietary course (on behalf of the appellant in 2024).
- Gatley Golf Club in Manchester – a 9-hole private members' club (on behalf of the appellant in 2024).

1.8 In addition, I have provided advice to clients at the planning application stage, and I have also given expert evidence at planning hearings.

1.9 I have also given expert evidence over the years on golf property and business matters at court and valuation tribunal cases.

1.10 Other advisory work examples: These include the following:

- Swinton Park Golf Club in Manchester. In July 2020 I was appointed by the Mayor of Salford City Council to provide an independent report on whether the club was financially viable as a golf course. The club had been closed by the then owners with a view to redeveloping the site for large-scale residential. I acted in a role similar to that of a third party 'independent expert' in a property dispute. I took evidence from the parties in dispute and then formed my own professional opinion.
- The Belfry in Birmingham. In 2021 I was appointed by Goldman Sachs to advise on the performance and potential of the golf operation, as part of the investment bank's due diligence process regarding a £100 million plus private equity purchase. This golf hotel is famous for holding the Ryder Cup for a record four times and is the home of The Professional Golfers' Association.
- Avisford Park Hotel in West Sussex. In 2022 I was appointed by Highways England to advise on viability issues relating to the proposed A27 Arundel Bypass Scheme taking a large part of the 18-hole golf course at this hotel.
- The Dundas Castle Estate near Edinburgh. In 2006 I gave expert evidence on golf viability and worth on behalf of Edinburgh City Council in the Lands Tribunal for Scotland. This related to a proposed 5-star golf course of 'international standing' at this estate.
- East Aberdeenshire Golf Course. In 2015 I was appointed by the Chief Valuer Scotland, on behalf of Transport Scotland, to provide independent expert evidence on the viability and worth of this venue in compulsory purchase proceedings.

1.11 Direct operational responsibility: In the past, my firm has also taken responsibility for operating several golf clubs on a management contract basis. Typically, these contracts arose where a club's owner was struggling with financial performance and our expertise was sought to improve this.

1.12 The UK golf clubs where my firm had management contract roles include Wrag Barn Golf Club, Harleyford Golf Club, Windwhistle Golf Club, Woodlands Manor Golf Club, Gatton Manor Golf Hotel, Redhill & Reigate Golf Club, Bulbury Woods Golf Club, Crane Valley Golf Club and Hurtmore Golf Club.

2. My role in this appeal

- 2.1 Following Redditch Borough Council's ('the Council') planning refusal, the Appellant requested my independent professional opinions on the development proposals from a golf related perspective.
- 2.2 I was instructed 'fresh to the scene', as I have never had any previously dealings with the Council, the Appellant or The Abbey Hotel. The latter owns and operates the 18-hole course.
- 2.3 I am aware of my duty as an expert witness. I am to give my true professional opinions for the benefit of the planning inspector and not those instructing or paying me. I have signed a statement of truth to this effect at the end of this proof.

3. The development proposals from a golf related perspective

- 3.1 I attach in Appendix MAS 2 the following:
1. A drawing showing the current course layout.
 2. The masterplan drawing prepared by golf course architect, Gaunt Golf Design showing the proposed course layout. This is Core Document B103.
 3. The card of the existing course.
 4. The card of the existing course versus the card of the proposed course (prepared by me).
- 3.2 In 'high level' terms the proposed changes are as follows:
1. Existing holes 2 and 3 are lost plus a small part of hole 4.
 2. The remaining holes are reconfigured to provide an alternative 18-hole course. This requires building new tees, greens, fairways and roughs, as appropriate, plus other necessary golf related alterations.

4. Relevant documents that I have considered

- 4.1 I have considered application and appeal documents which commented on the proposed course changes. I summarise over the page the key points raised.

- 4.2 **The Planning Committee Report (CD C1)**. Its page 11 confirms **England Golf's** position – which is 'no objection' to the proposed redesign (subject to safeguards to keep some holes open during the reconfiguration works). England Golf is the national governing body for amateur golf.
- 4.3 Page 14 refers to **Sport England's** position. They have not provided a detailed response as it is not within their statutory remit.
- 4.4 They do, however, refer to the planning policy test of the then paragraph 97 of the NPPF (now paragraph 104 of the current NPPF) regarding changes to sports facilities – and the **Council's Planning Case Officer** concluded that the development proposals passed this policy test.
- 4.5 Pages 20 to 27 refer to the comments made by the North Redditch Communities Alliance (**'NoRCA'**), some of which relate to the proposed course redesign. The comments are within sections 6.7 to 6.11. They object to the proposed course redesign. NoRCA have made further representations at the appeal stage.
- 4.6 Overall, the **Council's Planning Case Officer** was content with the proposed golf course alterations, and recommended planning approval for the development proposals.
- 4.7 **The Cornerstone Golf Report (CD A15)**. This is dated October 2021 and was prepared for The Abbey Hotel for the planning application.
- 4.8 **NoRCA's Position**. As well as their comments referred to in the planning committee report, NoRCA have made further golf related comments in their appeal statement dated 28 October 2024. This includes their response to the planning application dated 11 February 2022 (attached as their Appendix 1). I will comment separately on NoRCA's viewpoints later.

5. **My independent analysis**

- 5.1 **The main structural trends in the UK golf market over the last 40 years**. I believe it is important to provide some background context on how the UK golf course sector has evolved since the 18-hole course first opened in 1985.
- 5.2 This is important because one needs to understand: a) the course's overarching golf market positioning when it first opened in 1985; and b) and its current overarching golf market position today, nearly 40 years later.
- 5.3 A big change between a) and b) above may result in an important need to alter the physical design of the original course to make it relevant to golf market positioning needs today (and for the foreseeable future).

- 5.4 There are three types of golf venue in the UK. They are 'not for profit' private members' clubs, 'for profit' proprietary courses, and municipal courses. The Abbey Hotel's course is operated on a proprietary basis.
- 5.5 Private members' clubs are essentially run by their members primarily for the benefit of their annual subscription paying members, although nearly all actively allow visitors to play the course (by paying a visitor green fee). Most private members' courses were built around 80 to 140 years ago. They are therefore very established in the golf marketplace.
- 5.6 Municipal courses were built by local authorities to provide open access golf for those who did not have the means or did not wish to join a private members' club.
- 5.7 In the UK during the mid-1980s around 80% were private members' clubs, around 15% were municipal courses and around 5% were proprietary venues.
- 5.8 For several important reasons, golfer demand from around 1983 to 1990 greatly exceeded golf course supply. This acute demand sparked a golf course construction boom from around 1988 to the year 2000. Over 800 new golf courses were built in the UK during this period.
- 5.9 The 800 plus new courses increased the UK's golf course supply by over 30% by the year 2000. This then neutralised the golf course supply / golfer demand situation (no longer an acute undersupply of courses because the market was broadly in balance).
- 5.10 Then, for several reasons, the UK golf market suffered a long period of structural decline from around 2003 to 2019 (just before Covid started in March 2020).
- 5.11 A key driver of decline between 2003 and 2019 was falling golf participation rates, particularly relating to club membership. Substantially less golf was being played.
- 5.12 A Radio 4 programme aired in 2017 and called "*In the Rough: Golf's Uncertain Future*" gave listeners useful insights about the real difficulties many golf course operators faced at the time.
- 5.13 By the year 2019, the 1980s acute golfer demand position had totally reversed. There were now too many golf courses chasing the custom of too few golfers.
- 5.14 This resulted in the falling underlying profitability of golf courses for golf operators by 2019 compared to the heady trading days of the 1980s. They were working harder and smarter than ever before for less yearly operating profit.
- 5.15 Being able to make a reasonable yearly operating profit is very important for the long term financial sustainability of golf courses.
- 5.16 All operators would like to make a reasonable financial return on their golf course investments given the time, energy and risks in running a golf course business.

- 5.17 However, another vitally important factor is that it is out of the yearly operating profits made, the operators generate funds to reinvest in the golf course to make future profits in future years. This then creates long term financial sustainability.
- 5.18 A golf course that is poorly positioned in the golf marketplace for its primary golfing customers will struggle a great deal in this respect because of poor operational profitability. Sometimes physical changes are needed to better align the course to its primary golfing customers.
- 5.19 The Covid pandemic gave a welcome industry boost to golfer demand. This was because golf could be played when many other businesses and pastimes were forced to shut.
- 5.20 Today, generally, UK golfer demand is still up on 2019 pre-Covid levels.
- 5.21 However, golf course running costs have risen very substantially over the last four years due to various global and domestic factors. These include the knock-on effect of the war in Ukraine, higher energy costs, inflation, supply chain problems, the 'cost of living' crisis, and increased wage costs and employer national insurance contributions.
- 5.22 Today, the makeup of the UK golf sector is broadly as follows: around 50% are private members' clubs, around 40% are proprietary venues and around 10% are municipal venues.
- 5.23 The very substantial increase in proprietary golf venues compared to the 1980s (5% then and 40% now) has led to a much more competitive golf marketplace.
- 5.24 **The Abbey Hotel in 1985 versus today.** The course was designed by Donald Steel and opened in 1985 along with a modest sized hotel (32 bedrooms). The hotel has been extended significantly twice over the last four decades. Today it has around 100 bedrooms with a spa and health club plus a golf driving range.
- 5.25 Given golf's main structural trends, in my opinion, the 18-hole course's overarching market positioning has changed a lot.
- 5.26 Back in 1985 it would have been promoted as a 'challenging and difficult course'. This was the 'in vogue' way at the time: if you were going to build a new course, make it difficult and call it a 'championship course' to appeal to the pent up demand from golfers.
- 5.27 The primary appeal of the course would have been to locals for subscription paying club membership, although green fee paying visitors would have been most welcome.
- 5.28 There would have been limited play from those staying in the hotel, as it only had 32 bedrooms at the time.
- 5.29 Roll on 40 years to today and the venue's market positioning is very different from the original one.

- 5.30 Expanding the hotel from 32 to 100 bedrooms now means that a very important revenue stream for the hotel is golf breaks – people staying in the hotel and playing golf as part of a package deal.
- 5.31 The golf break package contributes to several of the hotel’s revenue/profit centres: overnight room occupancy and room revenue: golf course occupancy and golf revenue: and food & beverage spend during the stay.
- 5.32 The hotel’s golf club subscription paying membership element today, is important and valued, however it is not as strategically important from a golf hotel’s perspective as it was back in 1985. Because there are so many more golf courses today compared to back in 1985, local golfers have considerable choice as to where they play their golf.
- 5.33 If they are avid ‘club members’ they are much more likely to choose to play their golf at a local venue which is primarily about golf (no hotel attached). This is because there is a peak time conflict as to when club members and golf break golfers want to play – which is typically Saturday and Sunday mornings.
- 5.34 Naturally, a large 100 bedroom hotel will want to be able to offer its golf break guests tee times at these peak playing periods, meaning it cannot have too many subscription playing club members.
- 5.35 However – and most importantly – the current 18-hole course is too difficult to play for many of those now taking a golf break at the hotel. The low course utilisation rates demonstrate this.
- 5.36 The venue would have more appeal to the important golf breaks market if the course was easier to play; and this is an important strategic driver behind the proposed course changes.
- 5.37 **Current course users.** Total rounds played in 2023 was about 29,000. This is on the low side and reflects the difficulty of the existing course. The breakdown is as follows: 7,500 golf breaks rounds (26%), 12,000 member rounds (41%), 8,000 visitor pay and play rounds (28%), and 1,500 society/corporate day rounds (5%).
- 5.38 In 2019 (pre-covid) the total rounds played was only around 24,000 – which was very low.
- 5.39 In amateur golf there are five main handicap categories. They are: category 1 – handicaps 5 or less; category 2 – handicaps of 6 to 12; category 3 – handicaps of 13 to 20; category 4 – handicaps of 21 to 28; and category 5 – handicaps of 29 to 36.
- 5.40 The lower the category, the better the golfer’s playing standard; and vice versa.
- 5.41 As at 27 June this year the average golf handicap of the 175 members listed at the course was 21.5. This falls within category 4. There were only two category 1 handicaps, and these were 5.2 and 5.7. The club therefore has no scratch members (handicaps of zero or less).

- 5.42 Many golf clubs in England have numerous category 1 golf golfers. The fact that The Abbey Hotel does not, strongly suggests that its primary golfing market is recreational/casual golfers – as opposed to high quality players.
- 5.43 Given this, it makes a lot of strategic sense in golf market positioning terms to make the course easier and more enjoyable to play rather than harder (the latter is what the category 1 players generally prefer).
- 5.44 Hole statistics reports for the 9,729 rounds played from the men’s yellow tees between 1 January and 27 June 2024 shows that the average score was 96.7 – which was 25 over par (the par is 72). By comparison (and in simplified ‘like for like’ terms) a scratch golfer playing to handicap would score 72.
- 5.45 **Current course disabilities.** The course has several disabilities. These include: a clay based subsoil with poor drainage in places (meaning playability problems in the wet winter months); a dated irrigation system which is in the end stage of its productive life; expensive course maintenance costs due to a large site area for an 18-hole course (a 175 acre site area); some health and safety issues regarding stray golf shots; and slow play.
- 5.46 Whilst many golf courses are built on clay based soils, the drawback is winter playability concerns. This reduces market appeal and adversely affects revenue performance compared to a free draining course.
- 5.47 Generally, the normal working life of a golf course irrigation system is around 25 to 30 years. Much of the original 1985 irrigation system is still being used (40 years old). At some point soon, major replacement works will be needed.
- 5.48 In relative terms, replacing a worn out irrigation system is very expensive indeed. I regularly hear of 18-hole golf clubs having to spend around £400,000 to £600,000 to replace a worn out system.
- 5.49 A large golf course site area increases mowing maintenance costs, particularly if it is important to keep the grass short to make the course easier to play.
- 5.50 The main health and safety areas from stray golf shots relate to holes 1 and 5 where balls can occasionally land in nearby residential gardens.
- 5.51 Whilst I do not believe that the existing course is of true ‘championship standard (I discuss this later), the general perception is that most golfers find the course a hard challenge – and this contributes substantially to slow play.
- 5.52 Slow play is a major problem today in a world where most people are much busier than when the course first opened four decades ago. Five hour plus rounds are commonplace on the existing 18-hole course when, ideally, they should be four hours or less.

5.53 Any course design changes which improve the pace of play and make the game more enjoyable are positive changes.

5.54 **My conclusions regarding the existing course:**

1. The current 18-hole layout is too hard for the primary target golfing market of recreational/casual golfers – and particularly those taking golf breaks at the hotel. Slow play is a problem.
2. Poor drainage (clay subsoil) adversely affects its winter appeal.
3. The irrigation system will need a substantial and expensive upgrade soon.
4. The large acreage makes the course expensive to maintain (increased mowing).
5. If possible, improving the health and safety issues relating to stray shots on holes 1 and 5 would be a good thing.
6. From a strategic perspective, making the course easier and faster to play would better align it with the primary target golfing market of recreational/casual golfers, many of which would be golf breaks golfers.

5.55 **The Appellant's proposed course alterations.** I consider these, in golf related terms, using the benchmark of 'benefits' and 'harms' compared to the existing 18-hole layout. My weightings scale is as follows: neutral, moderate, significant, substantial.

5.56 The development proposals provide a shorter and easier course which is quicker to play. It is, however, still a reasonable length course, at just over 6,000 yards. The proposed length is 6,061 yards from the white tees instead of the current 6,463 yards. This is a length reduction of 6.2%.

5.57 Repositioning the course in this way is, in my opinion, a substantial strategic benefit in weighting terms. It will support the hotel's business positively because it will increase the appeal to a wider playing audience of recreational/casual golfers, and particularly to the hotel's golf break customers.

5.58 The course will continue to be open for the general public to play. My view is that an easier course will increase the venue's market appeal rather than decrease it – which I weight as a significant benefit. An easier course to play will appeal more to beginners, ladies, elderly golfers and generally all golfers of modest playing abilities – which accounts for the largest section of the UK's golfing market.

5.59 By contrast, category 1 golfers (high calibre players) only account for a small proportion of golfers and they are more likely to choose to play at other courses than the existing 18-hole course for reasons that I later explain.

- 5.60 If the appeal was allowed, I anticipate that some funds released from the housing aspect could be used to fund improvements to the course in the areas of land drainage and upgrading the irrigation system. Without such funds, it would be hard to justify such high capital expenditure on the existing course in 'return on capital invested' terms.
- 5.61 If course drainage and the irrigation system were substantially improved this would improve course presentation standards and extend the playing season. I would weight this as a significant benefit.
- 5.62 Reducing the acreage of grass to be mowed with a shorter course on a more compact site would reduce maintenance costs. I weight this as a moderate benefit.
- 5.63 The revised layout improves the health and safety aspect on the existing hole 5 (an overly long par 5 at 556 yards). It becomes hole 14 and is reduced in length to a 415 yard par 4. The redesign incorporates safety bunding on the left side to give protection to the housing facing the hole.
- 5.64 Reducing the length of the current 5th hole should also speed up the pace of play and make the course a little easier. In the wider context, I weight this aspect as a moderate benefit.
- 5.65 There is, however, some harm caused by the redesign. With the current layout, golfers have a walk of around 260 metres through the adjacent housing to get from the 1st green to the 2nd tee.
- 5.66 With the redesign this walk increases to around 500 metres. This walk is from the new 12th green (the old 1st green) to the new 13th tee. The walk is not ideal but is acceptable for a golf course which appeals primarily to casual/recreational golfers including those on golf breaks. I weight this change as moderate harm.
- 5.67 Overall, it is my opinion that in golf related terms the development proposals deliver several benefits which, when taken collectively, significantly outweigh any harm.
- 5.68 **My comments on NoRCA's views about changes to the golf course**. Their main golf related concerns appear to be as follows:
1. *The golf course's length will reduce by around 500 yards which weakens its golfing challenge. The reduced course and the increase in the number of shorter holes (par threes) will have a detrimental effect on the overall speed of play producing longer playing times, queues on tees and greens and thereby escalating health and safety risks for players. The 18 holes will be condensed and squeezed into a smaller acreage.*
 2. *The course will lose its 'Championship Standard' status and will cease to be one of Redditch's primary leisure resources and attractions. It is currently the only pay and play 18-hole course in the town. It will lose its attraction to all types of golfers.*

3. *During the alteration phase the course will be reduced to 10 playable holes. The club will be unable to attract golf societies, and the golf packages that contribute significantly to hotel revenues will dramatically decline. The alterations to the course will threaten its viability and sustainability.*

- 5.69 Taking these points in turn, regarding point 1, the course length reduces by 402 yards (from 6,463 yards to 6,061 yards). As I have explained earlier, I believe that a shortened course which is easier to play (which indeed '*weakens its golfing challenge*') is a substantial strategic benefit.
- 5.70 The existing 18-hole course has three par 3s and the proposed course has four par 3s (see Appendix MAS 2). I believe that having an extra par 3 hole is a benefit rather than a harm because it provides extra variety and balance to the 18-hole card. It is, however, not ideal to have 'back to back' par 3s (new holes 15 and 16), but in the wider context this not materially detrimental for casual/recreational golfers – the primary target market.
- 5.71 I do not agree with NoRCA's assertions regarding speed of play, queues on tees and greens and resulting health and safety concerns.
- 5.72 I view condensing the 18 holes into a smaller acreage as a benefit rather than a harm. It reduces maintenance costs which contributes towards the long term financial viability of the course.
- 5.73 Regarding NoRCA's concerns in point 2, I do not agree with their assertions that the existing 18-hole course has 'championship standard' status.
- 5.74 I do, however, agree with them that the existing course is 'challenging' – which means hard to play. The problem with this is that its challenging nature reduces the course's appeal to the hotel's main target market of golfers for the course – recreational and casual golfers.
- 5.75 This, in turn, affects the long term viability of the existing course because a course not doing enough yearly rounds because of a lack of market appeal is vulnerable to closure on financial viability grounds.
- 5.76 According to England Golf, there are around 1900 golf clubs in England. If the existing 18-hole golf course really was of 'championship standard', I would expect it to feature near the top of the list of the 'top 100 golf courses in England' on the website 'Top 100 Golf Courses'.¹ It does not appear within this list at all, let alone get close to the top of the list.
- 5.77 Furthermore, there are currently 32 affiliated golf clubs in the Worcestershire County Golf Union (founded in 1905) yet the existing 18-hole course does not even feature within the top 14 ranked courses in Worcestershire on the website 'Top 100 Golf Courses' (the list ends after 14 entries). I attach the current rankings in Appendix MAS 3. Only one course in

¹ See www.top100golfcourses.com

Worcestershire makes it into the ‘top 100 in England’, and this is Blackwell Golf Club, a private members’ club, at 76th.

- 5.78 I now turn to the UK’s top golf resorts which get much of their business from golf breaks. If the existing 18-hole course was of true ‘championship standard’ I would expect The Abbey Hotel to feature in listings for the top golf resorts in the UK.
- 5.79 The ‘Best Golf Resorts in Great Britain and Ireland | Golf World Top 100’ was last updated on 10 March 2023.² They ranked the venues using the following scale out of 100: up to 40 marks for the quality of the course, up to 20 marks for the quality of the accommodation, up to 20 marks for non-golf amenities, and up to 20 marks for the setting.
- 5.80 The Abbey Hotel does not feature within the UK’s top 100 golf resorts. Regional golf resorts that did were Celtic Manor near Newport in Wales (11th), The Belfry in the West Midlands (14th), St Pierre near Chepstow (39th), Heythrop Park in Oxfordshire (43rd), the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire (45th), and The Oxfordshire (75th).
- 5.81 I firmly conclude that whilst the term ‘championship standard’ may be attributed to the existing 18-hole course at The Abbey Hotel in colloquial terms and for marketing & promotional purposes, objectively, the course is not of true ‘championship standard’.
- 5.82 As an aside, I believe that category 1 golfers are more likely to take a golf break at a golf hotel which is perceived to be of significantly higher standard than the existing course at The Abbey Hotel.
- 5.83 I do not agree with NoRCA’s assertion that the redesigned course will mean that Redditch loses one of its primary leisure resources and attractions. I believe it helps protect the course because it widens its market appeal. It will still be the only 18-hole pay and play course in the town.
- 5.84 NoRCA’s assertion that it will lose its attraction to all types of golfers is simply not correct. The architectural redesign has been competently undertaken by Jonathan Gaunt, a very experienced and respected member of The European Institute of Golf Course Architects.
- 5.85 Regarding NoRCA’s concerns in point 3 about the course reducing to 10 holes during the construction phase, it is true that it is impossible to keep an 18-hole course fully open whilst the alteration works are done.
- 5.86 There are, however, many very established golf venues which permanently operate as 9-hole courses. Thus, providing 10 holes of golf is an acceptable temporary measure whilst the works are done to reconfigure the 18-hole course.

² See <https://www.todays-golfer.com/courses/best/golf-resorts-uk-and-ireland/>

- 5.87 Furthermore, the venue has a golf driving range so golfers can use this in the interim as well.
- 5.88 I accept that the hotel's golf revenue will naturally fall during the alteration works and some members may leave during this period.
- 5.89 The hotel is fully aware of this and will budget accordingly on the reasonable expectation that once the works are complete, it will have an 18-hole course much better aligned to its primary golfing audience – which helps secure the financial sustainability of golf at the hotel for the future.
- 5.90 I understand that the hotel is willing to allow existing club members to suspend or freeze their membership whilst the alteration works are done and rejoin when the 18-hole course reopens, or members can choose to pay a reduced annual subscription to play the 10 holes.

6. My concluding comments

- 6.1 Overall, and purely from a golf related perspective, my professional opinion is that the collective golf related benefits of the proposed development significantly outweigh any golf related harm. Accordingly, in respect of loss comprising a reduction in the size/length of the course, this would result in better provision for golf.
- 6.2 It therefore does not surprise me that the game's national governing body, England Golf, have no objections to the proposed course redesign.
- 6.3 Whilst I acknowledge the concerns of NoRCA regarding the proposed course redesign, I do not agree with their main assertions.

7. Statement of truth and declaration

- 7.1 I confirm that I have made clear which facts and matters referred to in this report are within my own knowledge and which are not. Those that are within my own knowledge I confirm to be true. The opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinions on the matters to which they refer.
- 7.2 I confirm that my evidence has drawn attention to all material facts which are relevant and have affected my professional opinion.
- 7.3 I confirm that I understand and have complied with my duty to the Planning Inspectorate as an expert witness which overrides any duty to those instructing or paying me, that I have given my evidence impartially and objectively, and that I will continue to comply with that duty as required.

- 7.4 I confirm that I am not instructed under any conditional or other success-based fee arrangement.
- 7.5 I confirm that I have no conflicts of interest.
- 7.6 I confirm that my report complies with the requirements of the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors), as set down in the RICS practice statement *Surveyors acting as expert witnesses*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Smith', written in a cursive style.

Mark Smith BA MRICS MBA

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**Appendices for Main Proof of Evidence on Golf Matters
from Mark Anthony Smith BA MRICS MBA**

3 January 2025

Appendices

MAS 1 – Background information on myself and firm

MAS 2 – Drawings of the existing and proposed course plus cards of the courses

MAS 3 – The top ranked golf courses in Worcestershire

Appendix MAS 1

Background information on myself and my firm

ABOUT SMITH LEISURE

smithleisure

UK GOLF PROPERTY EXPERTISE ■ CHARTERED SURVEYORS

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Our golf sector focus

The common theme is work related to UK golf venues. We provide specialist support and advice to clients on golf property and business matters.

We cover the whole golf property spectrum – from small stand-alone golf centres to trophy venues and luxury golf hotels plus newer formats, such as adventure golf.

We have a deep understanding of this market built up over 30 years. We are well placed to provide reliable and insightful advice to our clients.

We are in this sector for the long term. The principles of integrity, trust and professionalism underpin our business and the work we do for our clients.

Our differentiating point

We are the only chartered surveying firm which

- a) specialises solely in the UK golf market and
- b) has direct operational experience in running golf venues.

This blend of direct operational experience, coupled with consultancy work on hundreds of golf property projects, gives us a balanced perspective.

Our insights gained in this sector over many years helps our clients – either by adding significant financial value or giving clarity on their decision making processes.

Mark Smith set up Smith Leisure in 2004. He is member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and has an MBA from Henley Business School. He is a member of Golf Business International - a group of leading advisers providing support to the global golf community.

Our services relating to golf venues

These include (in alphabetical order):

- Business rates appeals
- Buying, selling and leasing
- Expert witness evidence
- Feasibility and viability studies
- Operational audits and management
- Property valuations
- Rent reviews and lease renewals
- Strategic plans/exit routes
- Town & country planning



84 Clay Street, Crockerton ■
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Regulated by RICS

Smith Leisure is a trading name of Springate Ltd. Registered Number 5909649. Registered Office:
St Mary's House, Netherhampton, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP2 8PU. VAT Number 847 1116 36

ABOUT SMITH LEISURE (cont.)

Our clients

These include proprietary golf operators, private members' clubs, freehold owners, local authorities, investors, banks, non-golf surveying firms, lawyers and accountants.

Most of our new work comes from personal recommendation. Below are some of the clients we have worked for over the years.

Addington Court Golf Centre
Addington Palace Golf Club
Altonwood Golf Group
American Golf (UK)
Ansty Golf Centre
Badgemore Park
Barnet Council
Barton on Sea Golf Club
Baydrive
Birchwood Park Golf & Country Club
Birmingham City Council
Blackmoor Golf Club
Bolton Council
Boughton Golf Club
Bradley Park Golf Course
Brampton Park Golf Club
Broadstone Golf Club
Brokenhurst Manor Golf Club
Builth Wells Golf Club
Burgess Hill Golf Centre
Burhill Golf & Leisure
Camberley Heath Golf Club
Came Down Golf Club
Canford Magna Golf Club
Cape Cornwall Golf & Leisure
Chelmsford City Council
Cheshire East Council
Chobham Golf Club
Chorley Council
City of Edinburgh Council
Cookridge Hall Golf Club
Coombe Wood Golf Club
Cottesmore Hotel Golf & Country Club
Cowdray Estate
Crown Golf

Dacorum Borough Council
Draycote Hotel
Dudsbury Golf Club Hotel & Spa
Dunham Forest Golf & Country Club
Dwellcourt Group
Ealing Council
East Berks Golf Club
Enmore Park Golf Club
Ferndown Golf Club
Five Lakes Hotel Golf & Country Club
Formby Ladies Golf Club
Frodsham Golf Club
GL Hearn
Goldman Sachs
Golf Kingdom Family Golf & Leisure Park
Goring & Streatley Golf Club
Gravesend Golf Centre
Greenwich Peninsular Golf Driving Range
Hampton Court Palace Golf Club
Harleyford Golf Club
Hartley Wintney Golf Club
Hartsbourne Country Club
Hatchford Brook Golf Centre
High Post Golf Club
Hobbs Cross Golf Centre
Hoburne Golf
Hoebriidge Golf Centre
Horton Park Golf Club
HSBC
Kingswood Golf & Country Club
Knight Frank
Littlestone Golf Club
London Borough of Bexley
London Borough of Enfield
London Borough of Hillingdon

Manhattan Loft Corporation
Mill Hill Golf Club
Mill Ride Golf Club
Mytime Active
National Golf Centre, Woodhall Spa
Newbury Racecourse
New Forest District Council
New Zealand Golf Club
Parkstone Golf Club
Pedham Place Golf Centre
Pentland Golf & Leisure
Pine Ridge Golf Club
PING Europe
Pinner Hill Golf Club
Playgolf
Portsmouth City Council
Premier Golf Developments
Preston City Council
Queenwood
Quod Planning Consultancy
Redlibbets Golf Club
Regent Park Golf Course
Remedy Oak
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Roehampton Club
Royal Bank of Scotland
Royal Guernsey Golf Club
Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club
Royal St George's Golf Club
Royal Winchester Golf Club
Rustington Golf Centre
Salisbury & South Wilts Golf Club
Sand Martins Golf Club
Scarborough North Cliff Golf Club
Scarborough South Cliff Golf Club

Silvermere Golf & Leisure
South Herts Golf Club
South Winchester Golf Club
Stirling Investments
Stafford Castle Golf Club
St Mellion International Resort
Studley Wood Golf Club
Sunningdale Golf Club
Surrey National Golf Club
The Addington Golf Club
The Belfry
The Dartmouth Hotel Golf & Spa
The Drift Golf Club
The Dye London
The Hertfordshire Golf & Country Club
The Kendleshire Golf Club
The Lambourne Golf Club
The Machrie Hotel & Links
The Point at Polzeath
The Shire London
The Shropshire Golf Centre
The Warwickshire Golf & Country Club
Thonock Park
Thornhill Estates
Thorpe Wood Golf Course
Transport Scotland
Vivien Saunders OBE
Waverley Borough Council
Wescom Group
Wirral Council
Witney Lakes Resort
Wrag Barn Golf & Country Club
Woburn Golf Club
Woodland Environmental
World of Golf

A MEMBER OF



Smith Leisure is a trading name of Springate Ltd. Registered Number 5909649. Registered Office:
St Mary's House, Netherhampton, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP2 8PU. VAT Number 847 1116 36



84 Clay Street, Crockerton ■
Warminster, Wiltshire ■
BA12 8AF. ■

Regulated by RICS

ABOUT MARK SMITH

smithleisure

UK GOLF PROPERTY EXPERTISE ■ CHARTERED SURVEYORS

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mobile: 07951 587303 ■
email: mark@smithleisure.com ■



Work focus – property and business matters relating to the UK golf sector

- Valuation matters (both capital and rental valuations plus business rates appeals)
- Expert witness evidence for court and tribunal cases plus public planning inquiries
- Viability studies and business plans
- Strategic reviews and management consultancy
- Rent reviews and lease renewals
- Sales, lettings and acquisitions (including due diligence)

Work experience

- 2004 - Set up Smith Leisure
- 2000 to 2004 - Property Golf & Finance Group Ltd (property director 2002-04)
- 1999 to 2000 – Strutt & Parker's golf department (head of brokerage)
- 1991 to 1999 – William Hillary Leisure & Hotel's golf department (associate)
- 1988 to 1991 – Hillier Parker in London (trainee surveyor)

Professional and academic qualifications

- Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors since 1991 and a RICS Registered Valuer
- MBA from Henley Business School
- Degree in economics and statistics from Exeter University

Other

- Website – www.smithleisure.com.
- Spoken at conferences and seminars on golf property issues
- Written articles for golf industry magazines on various topics



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Appendix MAS 2

**Drawings of the existing and proposed course
plus cards of the courses**

Drawing showing the existing layout of the 18-hole golf course

Source: UK Golf Course Guide





Legend

- Reshaped green surrounds
 - New/reshaped green
 - New/reshaped bunker
 - New/reshaped pond
 - New grassy hollow
 - New/reshaped fairway
 - Woodland man.
 - Tree planting
 - Cartpath
 - Hole No.
 - Centreline
 - New tee
-
- Ownership Boundary
 - Existing Footpaths
 - SSSI Area
 - Electric Cables on Pylons
 - Existing 5m Contours
 - Attenuation Lake
 - Flood Plain Extent

Revision History

Revision	Description	Date
A	Updated housing layout added	17th Nov 2022
B	Labels off, path from 12th to 13th bolded.	24th Nov 2022
C	Updated housing layout added	17th Feb 2023




Client :	The Abbey Hotel		
Project :	Course Redevelopment		
Drawing :	Final Masterplan		
Drawn By :	G.F.	Drawn Date:	3rd Sep 2020
Scale :	1:2500 @ A1	Revised:	17th Feb 2023
Drawing No. :	GGO-2951	Revision :	C 17th Feb 2023

COMPETITION										Member No.	Please indicate which tee used			
DATE	Handicap Index	Course Handicap					Handicap Index	Course Handicap	Par	SSS	Course	Slope		
Player A			Player C						72	72	71.7	129		
Player B			Player D						72	71	70.9	125		
									72	74	74.0	135		
Hole	Marker's Score/D	White Yards	Par	Yellow Yards	Stroke Index	Score			Nett Score	W = + L = - H = 0 Points	Red Yards	Par	Stroke Index	Speed of Play
1		315	4	293	12	A	B	C			285	4	12	
2		154	3	144	16						137	3	16	
3		335	4	332	6						328	4	6	
4		436	4	421	2						378	4	2	
5		556	5	552	10						453	5	10	
6		145	3	131	18						118	3	18	1Hr 35
7		344	4	338	14						332	4	14	
8		387	4	379	4						366	4	4	
9		394	4	378	8						293	4	8	
		3066	35	2968							2690	35		
PLEASE AVOID SLOW PLAY AT ALL TIMES														
10		174	3	162	17						142	3	17	
11		510	5	500	11						441	5	11	
12		412	4	407	1						370	4	1	3 Hrs
13		511	5	503	9						455	5	9	
14		380	4	374	5						335	4	5	
15		348	4	338	13						306	4	13	
16		403	4	391	3						334	4	3	
17		379	4	374	7						306	4	7	
18		280	4	271	15						212	4	15	4 Hrs 30
		3397	37	3320	IN						2901	37		
		3066	35	2968	OUT						2690	35		
		6463	72	6288	TOTAL						5591	72		

	STABLEFORD POINTS OR PAR RESULT	HANDICAP	Holes won
		NETT	Holes lost
			Result

Marker's Signature Player's Signature



THE
Hayes
HOTEL

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golf.shop@thehayeshotel.co.uk
www.thehayeshotel.co.uk

LOCAL RULES

1. OUT OF BOUNDS

- i) Beyond any ditch, hedge or fence, bounding the course.
- ii) Beyond any line marked by white stakes.
- iii) In or beyond the river running along the right hand side of holes 4 and 5.

2. OBSTRUCTIONS

- a) **MOVABLE** - Rule 24-1
- i) Stones in bunkers.
- b) **IMMOVABLE** - Rule 24-2
- i) Poles supporting overhead wires.
- ii) Stakes defining hazards and staked trees.
- iii) Artificially surfaced roads, tracks, paths.
- iv) Additional relief may be taken from intervention, on the line of play, by an immovable obstruction close to the green in accordance with Appendix 1 part A 4a of the Rules of Golf.

3. OVERHEAD WIRES

A ball striking an overhead wire or supporting pole must be dropped and replayed, without penalty, from a spot as near as possible to the place where the ball originally lay.

4. GROUND UNDER REPAIR

Relief must be taken from ground marked as G.U.R under Rule 25-1. Drainage channels, through the green, may be treated as G.U.R.

5. PENALTY AREAS Rule 17

All ditches/ponds marked with a red/yellow stake or a red line are penalty areas. Proceed under rule 17.

6. DISTANCE-MEASURING DEVICES Rule 14-3

The use of distance-measuring devices for the purpose of assessing distance only is permitted, strictly in accordance with Rule 14-3.


7. IMPENDING DANGER


Players must stop play when signalled by a klaxon and leave the course immediately.

PENALTY FOR BREACH OF LOCAL RULES:

Match Play - Loss of Hole;
Stroke Play - Two Strokes.

PLEASE GIVE PRIORITY TO GREENS STAFF

 Putting Green



Card of the existing course versus card of the proposed course

Card of the existing course			
Hole	White	Par	Yellow
1	315	4	293
2	154	3	144
3	335	4	332
4	436	4	421
5	556	5	552
6	145	3	131
7	344	4	338
8	387	4	379
9	<u>394</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>378</u>
	3066	35	2968
10	174	3	162
11	510	5	500
12	412	4	407
13	511	5	503
14	380	4	374
15	348	4	338
16	403	4	391
17	379	4	374
18	<u>280</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>271</u>
	3397	37	3320
Out	3066	35	2968
In	3397	37	3320
Total	6463	72	6288

Card of the proposed course		
Hole	White	Par
1	404	4
2	175	3
3	513	5
4	423	4
5	334	4
6	215	3
7	390	4
8	350	4
9	<u>479</u>	<u>5</u>
	3283	36
10	379	4
11	411	4
12	317	4
13	302	4
14	415	4
15	165	3
16	153	3
17	349	4
18	<u>287</u>	<u>4</u>
	2778	34
Out	3283	36
In	2778	34
Total	6061	70

Notes:















The quoted hole length are in yards

The quoted lengths for the proposed course are taken from the masterplan drawing on the previous page

Appendix MAS 3

The top ranked golf courses in Worcestershire

Appendix MAS 3 – the top 14 courses in the rankings for Worcestershire on the website ‘Top 100 Courses.com’

<p>01</p>  <p>Blackwell Golf Club Bramscreve, England Six times an Open Championship Regional Qualifying course, Blackwell Golf Club is the quintessential English gem and has a proud history dating back to 1893.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>76</p>	<p>06</p>  <p>Kidderminster Kidderminster, England The tree-lined fairways at Kidderminster Golf Club have been in play ever since the 1920s, a decade after the club was founded.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6</p>	<p>11</p>  <p>The Vale (International) Parshore, England The International course at The Vale Golf & Country Club is a 1991 Bob Sandow creation that is mature beyond its years. The par 74 layout measures an eye-watering 7,555 yards from the tips and it's even a testy 6,648 yards from the yellow tees.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>11</p>
<p>02</p>  <p>Moseley Birmingham, England The rolling fairways at Moseley Golf Club were remodelled by Harry Colt in 1918 and the course is configured with a couple of par threes and a closing par five on both the outward and inward half.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>2</p>	<p>07</p>  <p>Worcester Golf & Country Club Worcester, England Worcester Golf & Country Club was founded in 1898, but the course in play today at Boughton Park is an Alister MacKenzie design from 1927 and much of the Dr's original layout is evident.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>7</p>	<p>12</p>  <p>Droitwich Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire Droitwich Golf Club was founded in 1897, with members playing on a 9-hole layout on Bays Meadow.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>12</p>
<p>03</p>  <p>Fulford Heath Birmingham, England Fulford Heath Golf Club is a delightful James Braid-designed parkland course. The River Cole, three lakes and plenty of mature trees present their own challenges.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>3</p>	<p>08</p>  <p>Redditch Redditch, England Redditch Golf Club relocated to its present Callow Hill site in 1972 when architect Frank Pennink routed the 18 holes around a property that's part parkland and part woodland in character.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>8</p>	<p>13</p>  <p>Kings Norton (Yellow) Birmingham, Worcestershire Kings Norton Golf Club was founded in 1892, with a 9-hole course laid out across the New House and Wye Hall Farms by David Brown, the local professional who had won the Open at Musselburgh six years previously.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>13</p>
<p>04</p>  <p>Kings Norton (Red & Blue) Birmingham, England Kings Norton Golf Club members have the option of playing on three different 9-hole loops, which are each colour-coded – Blue, Red & Yellow. The three loops pair up to create the Weatheroak (Blue & Red), Brockhill (Yellow & Blue) and Wythall (Red & Yellow) courses, each of which ends with a par five.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>4</p>	<p>09</p>  <p>Stourbridge Stourbridge, England Stourbridge Golf Club was formed in 1892 and a course was laid out on the former Stourbridge racecourse. Today's layout stretches to 6,231 yards and the 203-yard 10th is a cracking one-shotter.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>9</p>	<p>14</p>  <p>Evesham Parshore, Worcestershire Situated within a compact 80-acre parkland property that lies half an hour's drive from Worcester city centre, the 9-hole layout at Evesham Golf Club has operated since the club was formed in 1894.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>14</p>
<p>05</p>  <p>The Worcestershire Malvern, England The Worcestershire Golf Club – established in 1879 – is the oldest in the county, but nine holes of its elegant 1820s Alister MacKenzie-designed 18-hole parkland course at Wood Farm were requisitioned during WWII, so F.W. Hawtree reinstated nine new holes in the early 1960s.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>5</p>	<p>10</p>  <p>Wharton Park Bewdley, Worcestershire Designed by Howard Swan, the 18-hole layout at Wharton Park Golf & Country Club lies just outside the attractive Georgian town of Bewdley on the River Severn, at the gateway of the Wye Forest national nature reserve.</p> <p>Discover More</p> <p>Played <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Play <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>10</p>	