

APPLICATION REPORT – 19/00094/FULMAJ

Validation Date: 7 February 2019

Ward: Chisnall

Type of Application: Major Full Planning

Proposal: Change of use from a golf course to a touring caravan site, to include six camping pods, the erection of an amenity block and a reception/shop building, landscaping mounds and associated infrastructure.

Location: The Laurels at Charnock Preston Road Charnock Richard Chorley PR7 5LE

Case Officer: Caron Taylor

Applicant: Mr Storey

Agent: Sophie Marshall, P Wilson & Company LLP

Consultation expiry: 31 May 2019

Decision due by: 16 August 2019 (Extension of time agreed)

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that the application is refused for the following reason:
2. The proposed development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to it. It is not considered the very special circumstances submitted outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

SITE DESCRIPTION

3. The application site is approximately 9.24 hectares in size and is accessed from an existing driveway serving The Laurels accessed off Preston Road, Charnock Richard. The Laurels comprises a 9-hole golf course, restaurant, café and function room.
4. Historically, the existing 9-hole golf course was part of a larger 18-hole golf course known as Charnock Richard Golf Course which closed in 2013. The northern part of the course was renovated and reopened as a 9-hole course last year and offers pay and play golf. This application is on what was the remaining 9-hole course which is currently not used for golf.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5. A change of use from a golf course to a touring caravan park is proposed, including 60 touring
6. caravan pitches, six camping pods, the erection of two amenity blocks (including one reception/shop building), the creation of an access track, landscaping mounds and associated infrastructure (e.g. hardstanding pitches, bin enclosures etc.).

RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE SITE

7. There is no recent planning history relevant to the current application.

REPRESENTATIONS

8. 22 objections have been received and 40 representations of support as follows:

The objections cite the following grounds:

Principle

- The proposal is in the Green Belt which must be preserved;
- The site is not previously developed land as there is or was no permanent structure on the site;
- The change of use of land from a golf course to a caravan site is not inappropriate development however it must preserve openness, even if this harm is only limited, which this proposal does not. The facilities building, the pods and 60 caravans all amount to development which does not preserve openness of the Green Belt;
- The significant reconstruction and visual changes to the Green Belt would result in a negative impact on the natural beauty of the land and its surroundings;
- There is no need for a caravan park;
- The proposal is a back door route to obtaining planning permission for a more damaging development;
- Only a few jobs would be created;
- If the business fails then they fear what would happen to the land;
- They do not wish to see any more countryside lost;
- Green Belt should be turned into a haven for wildlife;
- The proposal is not a very special circumstance in the Green Belt and is harmful to the land;
- Change of use if allowed would only be the start of development on the site;
- The scale of infrastructure proposed is excessive for a caravan park but more for a housing estate;
- They have been fighting for permission on Green Belt land for their Gypsy and Traveller site for the last 10 years and are constantly told it is inappropriate development. If this application is passed it is discrimination;
- If the plans are passed and the business fails the Council should return it to Green Belt land.

Wildlife

- The dog walking area is adjacent to animal grazing land and to woodland that houses geese and protects wildlife such as deer and shows lack of consideration. The plans do not demonstrate how this would operate and does not show adequate fencing. It should be located away from agricultural land;
- Concerned it would scare off wildlife.

Drainage

- The site is prone to holding service water and new hardstandings and roads would increase this on surrounding land. The proposal should include a sustainable drainage system rather than rely on an inadequate water course and soak away.

Footpaths

- Additional footpaths have been shown alongside grazing areas, an increase use would lead to an increased risk to neighbouring livestock. Footpaths in unnecessary areas alongside adjoining properties and agricultural land should be removed and the park should be private with no access to people not staying at the site.

Lighting

- There would need to be lighting where there is currently none.

Amenity

- It would result in noise to existing local residents;
- It would attract unwanted visitors who would create anti-social behaviour;
- The use of landscape mounds around the perimeter of the site are merely attempts to conceal the site which they would rather be left as an area of visual beauty with an abundance of wildlife;
- Thousands of wagon loads of hard-core and soil would be brought in and could cause chaos with local wildlife;
- The bunds/mounds would ruin current views from the A49;
- No management plan has been submitted on how it would co-exist with neighbouring uses e.g. campfires, no details on amplified music, group bookings etc.
- The additional bunding proposed could become unsupervised play areas and result in overlooking to the nearest residents.

Highway safety

- It would add traffic to an already busy road;
- The amount of infrastructure needed would mean a great deal of heavy use to the roads which would create more disruption when repairs are needed.

Other matters

- The local restaurants and pubs are already often fully booked;
- Most of the supporters do not live near the site;
- There has been no pre-application consultation by the applicant;
- The views from Festive Light would be of 23 pitches over a 3m mound screen. They have invested considerably in the maintenance and appearance of their Headquarters and were awarded 'Industrial/commercial property winner' in Lancashire's best kept village competition. Supporters are commenting on the benefit to local businesses but the proposal would be of no aesthetic or commercial gain to Festive Lights Ltd;
- The locality and outlook of Festive Lights is a draw for talented individuals many of whom highlight the rural setting as one of the main attractions to their employment;
- The construction period would create significant noise, continuous flow of lorries, deterioration of roads and considerable dirt along with air borne dust;
- Could landfill material be brought in to create the mounds?;
- The local electricity service struggles to support the number of properties in the area.

The following comments have been made in support of the application:

- The Laurels is a fabulous venue and has provided a much needed place in the area to eat, drink and celebrate;
- The proposal would bring more tourism and interest to the area, which in turn would create more employment and an overall better use of the land;
- The proposal would bring more amenities to the area and be beneficial to the local community;
- It would increase spending for local businesses and support the local economy;
- A shop on site would be welcomed by the locals who have complained about no such facility in the village for a number of years;
- A caravan park won't result in the wildlife disappearing;
- Construction traffic would only be temporary;
- The addition of camping pods would make it a unique attraction;
- Local businesses and enterprise should be supported;
- There is a lack of facilities/hotels/accommodation in the area;
- The proposal includes provision of a dedicated public footpath which would be open to use by all;
- It would be a great use of the Green Belt which would be previously left derelict;

- It would allow families to make the most of the picturesque countryside;
- The existing complex at The Laurels is beautifully kept and the attention to detail impeccable and they believe the caravan and glamping facilities would be no exception;
- The existing site has high standards of environmental care and presentation and the owners state they are sensitive to the environment, actively encouraging more biodiversity;
- The land is only going to waste at the moment;
- Children spend too much time indoors and should be encouraged to visit locations such as The Laurels;
- It would be affordable to families;
- It would maintain the natural beauty within the site and encourage more wildlife areas than currently existing within the golf course;
- They would rather the land be used for leisure than housing or industrial units;
- In terms of traffic it is close to a motorway and coped with a theme park for many years;
- It would allow people to enjoy the excellent walking and cycling routes in the area;
- They are concerned lack of understanding and incorrect information people are using to influence others in relation to planning, Green Belt policy and change of use – change of use does not change the fact the land is greenfield under the policy of Green Belt, nor does it make it any more likely to change that in the future;
- It is less destructive than previously approved development;
- It would support Heskin Hall Shopping Village where there are over 50 small independent businesses and provides employment for over 100 local people.

CONSULTATIONS

9. Charnock Richard Parish Council: Object to the application as it would constitute inappropriate development in Green Belt and would significantly affect the openness of the Green Belt in Charnock Richard.
10. Whilst the Parish Council acknowledge that the site can be used for outdoor recreation, an appropriate use in the Green Belt, however, investigations have found nothing specific to confirm that the definition of outdoor recreation includes use as a touring caravan site. The Parish Council believe this fact is further confirmed by the description of the proposal which involves a "change of use" of the land. If the proposed use as a touring caravan site, including six camping pods, is outdoor recreation then, by definition, a change of use would not be required. The proposed use is completely different to use of the land as a golf course or football training facility, both of which are clearly outdoor recreation.
11. Case law on this subject seems to relate to extensions to already existing touring caravan sites, this is clearly not the case at this site, which is currently an amenity grassland site containing a number of protected trees, some of which it is proposed will be removed.
12. The proposal, if allowed, would totally change the green field site for neighbouring residents, anyone using the public rights of way around the site, village residents, visitors to the village and anyone else who may view the site from a public vantage point. The amenity value of the greenfield site will be lost forever, the land in question would never look the same again and the proposal would adversely affect the character of the area.
13. Openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt and can be interpreted as the absence of building and development. The creation of large mounds around the site would clearly obstruct the openness of the site and would have a detrimental impact on the surrounding area. The siting of caravans, camping pods and an amenity building, would clearly and very obviously impact on the openness of the site as there are currently no structures or buildings of any description on this piece of land to detract from the beautiful open green field site.
14. The significant importation of materials required to complete the proposals, together with the new infrastructure proposed and the changes required to the landscape, would have a

destructive, harmful and environmentally unfriendly impact on the considerable amount of local wildlife in this locality e.g. newts and nesting birds etc, and on the flora and fauna in the area. Furthermore, the quality of life of residents living adjacent to the site, for whom the close proximity of the proposed touring caravan pitches would be both unwelcome and objectionable and would clearly interrupt the current green belt character and expanse of the land at the rear of, and adjacent to, their homes.

15. The impact of additional lighting where there is currently none, and the noise generated from the proposed use would be intrusive, would affect their quality of life, would result in a significant loss of amenity and, could result in statutory nuisance to local residential dwellings.
16. The existing access is considered to be inadequate and would compromise highway safety on the A49 and for vehicles exiting the site. The A49 is a fast road and congestion could be caused by vehicles waiting to enter the site from the filter lane which cannot safely accommodate more than one vehicle towing a caravan. Add to this the vehicles, some of which would be towing a caravan on change over days exiting the caravan site, together with any vehicles using the existing golf course and restaurant on the site, all using the current, and only, unaltered access to the site.
17. Concern has also been expressed as to whether the existing drainage systems to and from the site would be adequate to support the proposal and not have an adverse impact on the current drainage systems serving existing properties.
18. The Parish Council feel that the proposal would not only have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt at this site but would also result in over-intensification of the site, to fulfil a need which has not been proven in the area and, which can be easily satisfied by the 5-6 existing touring caravan sites within a few miles radius of this site.
19. According to National Planning Policy Framework, the Green Belt serves 5 purposes - 134c) "to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment" The Parish Council feel that the proposal would pose a significant encroachment into the countryside at this location. 141 states "once green belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity The proposals at this site would completely alter and detrimentally affect the landscape whilst at the same time threatening the visual amenity of the green belt for local residents and visitors to the village.
20. The Parish Council would also like to point out that 138 of the National Planning Policy Framework for the protection of Green Belt land states "where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed and/or is well-served by public transport". Whilst this land is neither previously developed nor well served by public transport at this moment in time, serious concern has been expressed that if permission is granted for 'change of use' to a touring caravan site with camping pods, in the future the applicant could claim that this is previously developed land as it would then contain structures and buildings, and request that the land be released from the Green Belt or that the Green Belt boundary should be revised to remove the Green Belt designation.
21. However, if Chorley Council Planning Committee has a mind to grant planning permission for the proposal, the Parish Council would like to ask that the following condition be attached to the planning permission:
22. "Should the proposed use as a touring caravan site with camping pods, associated buildings, landscaping and infrastructure cease to be used for this purpose, the land must be restored to its current use. All touring pitches, camping pods, buildings and infrastructure to be removed and the green field status must be restored."
23. Lancashire Highway Services: See body of report.

24. Greater Manchester Ecology Unit: The main ecological issue associated with the site is great crested newts. See body of report.
25. Regulatory Services - Environmental Health: Chorley Council Environmental Health officers have reviewed all the supporting documents for the application in relation to the potential for statutory nuisance arising at neighbouring residential properties. Whilst there are no initial objections to this proposal, Environmental Health are of the opinion that the following is required:
 26. A lighting plan, demonstrating how artificial lighting shall be managed to stay within the curtilage of the land, to not be intrusive and therefore not be a nuisance to local residential dwellings.
 27. A management plan to ensure that all noise and all aspects of anti-social behaviour are managed to prevent disturbance and statutory nuisance to local residential dwellings.
28. Lead Local Flood Authority: Originally objected to the application, however following the submission of further drainage details included in the Flood Risk Assessment (ref. CFC19031 rev 0, dated May 2019) they have withdrawn their objection to the proposed development, and recommend the inclusion of a planning condition.
29. Council's tree officer: See body of report.
30. CIL Officers: The development will be CIL liable if approved subject to the CIL Charge for Convenience Retail and All Other Uses.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Policy background

31. The site is located in the Green Belt. There are two parts to the proposal, the change of use of the land itself, and the buildings and other infrastructure associated with it.
32. In terms of the proposed change of use from a golf course to a touring caravan site, this needs to be considered under paragraph 146 of the National planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This states:
 - a. *'Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt*
 - b. *provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of*
 - c. *including land within it. These are:*
 - d. *...e) material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport*
or
 - e. *recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds);...*
33. Therefore, an assessment has to be made as to whether the proposed change of use preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it, to come to a conclusion on whether the change of use of the land is inappropriate development or not.
34. In terms of the associated infrastructure, this consists of two buildings (a reception/shop building and amenity block), bin enclosure, 60 touring caravan pitches in the form of hardstandings and an access track.
35. The buildings need to be considered under paragraph 145 of the Framework which states:
 - a. *A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:*
 - b. *...b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land*
 - c. *or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;...*

36. The other aspects, such as the track, bin enclosures and landscape mounds need to be assessed under paragraph 146 criterion b) as engineering operations, so again an assessment has to be made as to whether the proposed change of use preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
37. Whether the camping pods are a building or fall within definition of caravan and are, therefore, a change of use of the land depends on their size, permanence and physical attachment to the ground.
38. The planning system relies upon the definition of a caravan as set out in the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 (as amended), and the Caravan Sites Act 1968.
39. Section 29(1) of the 1960 Act defines a caravan as:
“...any structure designed or adapted for human habitation which is capable of being moved from one place to another (whether by being towed, or by being transported on a motor vehicle or trailer) and any motor vehicle so designed or adapted but does not include:

- a) Any railway rolling stock which is for the time being on rails forming part of a railway system, or
- b) Any tent.”

Additional provisions also relate to twin-unit caravans. Section 13(1) of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 provides that:

“A structure designed or adapted for human habitation which:

- c) Is composed of not more than two sections separately constructed and designed to be assembled on a site by means of bolts, clamps or other devices; and
- d) Is, when assembled, physically capable of being moved by road from one place to another (whether by being towed, or by being transported on a motor vehicle or trailer)

shall not be treated as not being (or not having been) a caravan within the meaning of Part 1 of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 by reason only that it cannot lawfully be moved on a highway when assembled.”

A twin unit caravan shall not be larger than:

- e) Length (exclusive of any drawbar): 20 metres (65.616 feet)
- f) Width: 6.8 metres (23.309 feet)
- g) Internal height: 3.05 metres (10.006 feet).

40. There are two sizes of camping pod proposed, a two-person pod and a four-person pod. Both would fall within the size definition of a caravan. The applicant's agent has advised they would not be fixed to the ground but rather placed on a hard standing pad and in terms of services would only benefit from electricity similar to an electric hook up. They are, therefore, considered to fall within the definition of a caravan and are assessed as a change of use of the land under Paragraph 146 of the Framework.

Policy assessment

41. Therefore, for all aspects of the proposal an assessment has to be made as to whether the openness of the Green Belt is preserved and if the proposals conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
42. Paragraph 133 of the Framework states the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
43. Openness is not defined in the Framework but is generally seen to mean freedom from development. It is largely, therefore, seen as a spatial designation, and whilst it is not a landscape designation in terms of landscape impact, there is a visual component to it.

44. The Framework at Paragraph 144 states:
'When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.'

45. Therefore, harm to openness must be considered under 'other harm'.

46. Case law has established that openness is capable of having a visual dimension as opposed to purely a narrow volumetric (spatial) approach. Visual impact can, therefore, be relevant to the question of whether the openness of the Green Belt would be preserved. Therefore, visual as well as spatial impacts need to be considered distinctly from one another in assessing the impact of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt.

Spatial impact

47. The proposed reception building would be positioned near the entrance to the site and would have a floor area of approximately 58m² with a covered canopy of approximately 9m². It would be single storey, approximately 4.1m high with pitched roof likely to be constructed of fibre cement panels. As well as being reception for the site it would house a small shop.

48. A second amenity building is proposed housing toilets and washing facilities. This would have a floor area of 88.5m² and would also be approximately 4.1m high with a pitched roof. This would be located central to the touring pitches.

49. The six camping pods proposed would be positioned between the site access road and a proposed 3m high bund.

50. In terms of the existing spatial impact of the site, the topography, landscaping and layout remains as a golf course, with the bunkers, water features, walkways, fairways, drainage and greens still visible and in situ. The land is mowed regularly to maintain a tidy approach and view out for golfers enjoying the 9-hole course to the north. It is generally flat in nature with the former fairways separated by ribbons of trees.

51. In terms of the touring caravans themselves it is accepted that their impact would be transient in nature, having more impact the more they are on site and whether their accompanying towing vehicle is present alongside them or not.

52. The proposed buildings, camping pods and other associated facilities clearly have more impact on openness than what exists at present on site.

Visual impact

53. This assessment is in relation to the visual dimension of openness of the Green Belt (this is different from landscape considerations). A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) accompanies the application which aims to evaluate the effect of a proposal on the landscape. An assessment needs to be made on how the visual impacts of the proposal would bear on the question of whether the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

54. The LVIA report states the following on page 39. *'The two small buildings are the features which would affect openness of the Green Belt. The effect would be limited given the size of buildings relative to the extent of the Green Belt. Integrity of the Green Belt with regard to its openness and permanence would not be compromised as a result.'* However, in terms of 'visual' intrusion on the openness of the Green Belt, the transient touring caravans and cars periodically on the site combined with the permanent amenities buildings and camping pods are all relevant and warrant further consideration. Also, with regard to the test of whether the proposal preserves the openness of the Green Belt, harm is still caused even if the effect is only limited.

55. In addition, the introduction of the proposed bunding (up to a maximum height of 3m) although screening some facilities would result in the curtailment of wider views across the landscape which are currently possible, and it is considered that this is also relevant to the visual dimension of openness of the Green Belt. The LVIA acknowledges that limited filtered views of the caravans and amenity buildings would be possible in between the proposed planting/bunding. However, in this instance it is considered that the proposed screening, whilst good site planning in landscape/visual amenity terms is actually harmful in terms of visual dimension of openness of the Green Belt.
56. The resulting loss of perceived visual openness of the Green Belt would be experienced by users of Regional Cycle Route 91, motorists and pedestrians using Preston Road, residents of the single storey property at the junction of Mill Lane/Preston Road and residents of the ribbon development along Preston Road where orientated towards the development (from upper storey windows).
57. It is, therefore, considered that there is an element of perceived visual intrusion resulting in a limited degree of harm to the visual dimension of openness of the Green Belt. This is particularly evident as there is no existing development on the application site and despite the presence of a limited number of landscape features such as low bunds, bunkers and footpaths, the openness of the Green Belt has been largely preserved to date.

Spatial and visual impact assessment

58. Taken together it is, therefore, considered the proposal results in both a spatial and visual impact on the openness of the Green Belt when compared to what exists on site at present. Therefore, it is not considered that the proposal preserves the openness of the Green Belt.
59. In relation to the Green Belt purposes, only criterion c), as set out in paragraph 134 of the Framework, is relevant which concerns safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. The effect of development as encroachment may be in the form of loss of openness or intrusion.
60. As stated above, the introduction of the proposed bunding would result in the curtailment of wider views across the landscape which are currently possible. However, in this instance it is considered that the proposed screening, whilst good site planning in landscape/visual amenity terms is actually harmful in terms of visual dimension of openness of the Green Belt. The development consequently represents a visual intrusion, which constitutes an encroachment into the countryside.
61. It is not considered that simply removing the proposed bunds from the application would overcome the above issue as it is considered the scheme would be unacceptable without them in landscape/visual amenity terms.
62. Consequently, the development is inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt.
63. In accordance with paragraphs 143 and 144 of the Framework inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
64. It has been established that very special circumstances do not have to be unusual or rare. Several commonplace factors when taken together can amount to very special circumstances. The applicant has put forward the following factors to be considered together:
65. The proposal represents a reuse of a previous leisure site, retaining and providing a different recreation opportunity for the public to enjoy (a golf course use is still retained on the adjoining site);

66. The Local Plan Proposals Map shows how much of Chorley's countryside area is washed over by the Green Belt. The only significant countryside area outside of the Green Belt is to the East of Chorley Town Centre, well away from the site, including the M6 corridor that links the north and south. Accordingly, a leisure proposal such as this is highly unlikely to be located anywhere other than in a Green Belt location within this area of the Borough;
67. There is a distinct lack of other caravan sites in the area;
68. The site would help put Chorley on the map as a local tourist destination and existing local attractions are likely to benefit from additional users;
69. Data and surveys produced by the NCC and Sandersall Weatherall (Appendix 5) report a buoyant 2018 season for caravan parks, and caravan sales, and remain optimistic for the future. To quote the 2019 Holiday & Caravan Park Market Report produced by Sandersall Weatherall, "Despite a slower start, touring and camping parks enjoyed a good year on the back of holiday makers seeking to stay closer to home and assisted by prolonged spells of dry, warm weather." Followed by, "On the whole there remains a high level of confidence in the sector." And, it recognised the growth of 'glamping', which would be provided on site in the form of the camping pods, "Another trend we have seen is parks diversifying to provide high quality glamping accommodation, again seeking to benefit from the upturn in demand and also catering for a wider and younger market of holidaymakers who may not have previously been attracted to a caravan or camping holiday.";
70. The Applicant owns the adjoining site (The Laurels), which would complement the caravan site use by providing further recreation opportunities (golf), and existing on-site eateries and bar areas. The same high-level quality design would be used when constructing the caravan site. All the existing facilities also contribute to the sustainability of the development;
71. The landscape of the site has already been changed for the golf course use. It already has many man-made features and is well contained by existing trees and landscaping;
72. The proposal would provide access to the countryside for more people for a different activity;
73. Additional areas of open space are accommodated on the site to improve views, and for the benefit of site users;
74. Ecological enhancements are proposed within the ecology report. At present the site is intensively managed by regularly mowing the grass and limiting the ecological value of the site, especially those areas immediately around the ponds;
75. A dedicated footpath is proposed on the Applicant's land to the north of the site. This would link up existing footpaths for the benefit of the wider community;
76. Footpath links within the site are proposed to link to the footpaths to the north, ensuring users of the caravan park can walk to Charnock Richard centre, including recreation areas without walking on a main road;
77. The amenities map shows the site is within close proximity of a convenience store, public houses, bus stops, children's play areas, and footpaths, in addition to the onsite facilities;
78. The proposal would benefit the wider public and locality as users would contribute to boosting the rural economy, not just for local attractions, but also local businesses;
79. Tourism uses are supported and encouraged in the Core Strategy and the rural SPD.
80. The above factors have been fully considered. Particularly noted is the economic benefits the proposal would bring to the area. However, individually or together it is not considered that they amount to very special circumstances that clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, that is given significant weight in the balancing exercise.

Landscape

81. This is an assessment of the effect of the development on views and the landscape itself (separate from the visual aspect associated with preserving the openness of the Green Belt assessed above).
82. The LVIA report concludes that the overall residual effect on the existing local landscape character in the long term would be minor adverse. The report concludes that the majority of residual visual effects experienced by local receptors would be negligible in the long term. However, residual minor adverse visual effects are identified for residential receptors close to the site comprising the single storey property at the junction of Mill Lane/Preston Road and upper storey windows of properties in the Ribbon Development along Preston Road where orientated towards the development. These findings reflect the existing mature vegetation flanking the boundaries of the site, the relatively small scale and low height of the proposed development and the proposed embedded landscape mitigation measures. The proposed bunding would provide screening of the site from outside.
83. The landscape strategy submitted is noted, however, if the application was to be permitted, a landscaping condition would be necessary to ensure the provision of a detailed landscape mitigation scheme encompassing both details of the planting numbers/species/type/stock size/planting density and the height/profile for the bunds/mounds in order to achieve the desired screening effects. Subject to such a condition the proposal is considered acceptable from a landscape perspective.

Trees

84. There are a large number of trees on the site mainly running along the former fairways. There are also a number of trees close to the site entrance that are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO 5 Charnock Richard 2014).
85. There are three individual Category A trees and one small group of Category A trees (based on British Standard BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations) on the site, all of which are to be retained. The majority of trees on the site are Category B trees (moderate quality) with the rest being Category C (low quality).
86. The proposed development includes a modification to the existing access road into The Laurels.
87. Golf Course from Preston Road to achieve access to the site. This would result in the loss of some trees covered by the Tree Protection Order specifically parts of two Category B groups (G4 and G7).
88. It is also proposed to remove Group 44 and 56 (both categorised as C low quality) and Group 49 and Trees 7 and 22, but both of these are categorised as Unsuitable for Retention. These trees would not be worthy of protection by a TPO due to their categorisation and is, therefore, considered acceptable. The Council's Tree Officer does note that T7 (an Ash) is not in good health and has a sparse canopy. He advises this looks to be due to raised soil levels and soil disturbance around the base of the tree which would be expected to have a detrimental impact on the health of the tree and, therefore, amelioration can be actioned to help improve the current health condition of the tree. The Council's Tree Officer advises he has spoken with the tree owner and explained that he is in breach of TPO legislation by affecting soil levels without permission and he has agreed to address the matter. It is accepted that T7 is a prominent tree which has a positive impact on local amenity, however the loss of this tree and those outlined above is unavoidable to gain access to the site and removal has been kept to only what is necessary. It is not considered this limited loss would have an unacceptable impact on the landscape. In addition, additional planting is proposed which could be controlled by a condition.

Ecology

89. The ecology report states that previous surveys have established that great crested newts are present in ponds within the site and across the wider landscape. The Council's ecology advisor states that whilst these surveys are out of date, given that small populations were

present in nearly all the ponds within 250m the consultants argue that further surveys are not required as they are unlikely to result in a significantly different outcome. They base this on a relatively recent policy from Natural England that accepts that in terms of licensing up to date surveys are not required where it is unlikely that new surveys would change the existing knowledge. Whilst this policy is aimed primarily at licensing, from a planning perspective in this instance they are comfortable that given the nature of the development the long-term impact on great crested newts would be positive. They are, therefore, satisfied that no further surveys are required.

90. A Great Crested Newt Mitigation Strategy has been provided with the ecology report. As there are a few possible variations noted in the strategy based on when the works are carried out and few areas where they believe tightening up would be desirable, they recommend that a finalised newt mitigation strategy is conditioned to be provided prior to any site clearance or earthworks.
91. The proposed development would result in the loss of small areas of trees and scrub. Though the majority are to be retained, they have potential bird nesting habitat. All British birds nests and eggs (with certain limited exceptions) are protected by Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. The ecologist, therefore, recommends a condition that no works to trees or shrubs occur during the bird breeding season unless a detailed bird nest survey by a suitably experienced ecologist has been carried out immediately prior to clearance and written confirmation provided that no active bird nests are present.
92. The ecology report shows small areas of Himalayan balsam were recorded on site. Himalayan balsam is included within Schedule 9 Part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. It is an offence to introduce or cause to grow wild any plant listed under this schedule. A condition would, therefore, be needed requiring a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures for Himalayan balsam on the site.
93. Paragraph 170 of the Framework states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development would result in the loss of amenity grassland and small numbers of trees, but it is proposed to restore much of the grassland on completion to higher value habitats as well as providing additional tree planting. The Council's ecological advisor is satisfied that net gain can be achieved and, therefore, recommends the provision of a Landscape and Environmental Management Plan is conditioned which includes sections on areas of semi-natural grassland, native tree planting; enhancement measures for great crested newts and enhancement for nesting birds if the application is approved.
94. Subject to conditions the application is considered acceptable in relation to ecology matters.

Neighbour amenity

95. Although relatively rural in its location, the site shares a boundary with three residential properties in the south east and is close to the other properties on Preston Road.
96. Low level lighting (approximately 1m high) would be installed at intervals along footpaths and roads. Given its nature it is not considered that this would cause light pollution outside the site or be intrusive to neighbouring properties, though the comments of Environmental Health are noted, and it is considered full details would be required through a lighting plan. This could be secured via a condition.
97. Other aspects of the site also have the potential to cause disturbance to surrounding properties, including noise, campfires, group bookings and hours between which noise must be kept to a minimum (curfew). These come down to the management of the site. It is considered that a management plan would be necessary to ensure that the site is managed properly, and this could also be secured via a suitably worded condition.

Highway safety

98. LCC Highways have commented that the Transport Assessment (TA) originally submitted with the application relates to an application in 2014 in relation to football training facilities. However, they consider that the nature and timings of vehicle movements would be different from the previous proposal and they need to be satisfied that the access and access road could accommodate safely the proposed traffic. LCC Highways is satisfied that in terms of highway capacity there would not be an unacceptable impact and as such capacity analysis would not need to be covered in a TA, but without one the development proposal fails to demonstrate that a safe means of access could be provided and promote sustainable travel.
99. The applicant has now submitted a TA specific to the current application on which LCC Highways have been consulted. Their response will be provided on the committee addendum.

Flood risk and drainage

100. In terms of surface water, the existing site has the benefit of an extensive network of land drains and a number of existing ground fed ponds. Therefore, it is proposed to construct all the access tracks and caravan pitches with permeable materials comprising compacted stone with gravel finishes which would drain all surface water into the existing ground drainage system and mimic the existing situation. The two buildings proposed as part of the application would be allowed to discharge roof water into stone filled trenches. These excavations would be filled with clean single-sized aggregate and would be sized to accommodate run-off from a 1 in 100-year storm event including a 20% allowance for climate change, which would permit water to infiltrate into the ground and discharge eventually into the adjacent land drains. This is in accordance with the drainage hierarchy set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance. Therefore, the proposal would not generate an increase in surface water runoff to nearby watercourses.
101. United Utilities have indicated that foul water from the site is permitted to connect to the combined public sewer, therefore, foul water from the proposed amenity blocks would be drained by either by a new direct gravity connection to the combined sewer, or if invert levels permit, via the foul drains serving the existing golf clubhouse and restaurant complex.
102. Initially the Lead Local Flood Authority objected to the application as a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) had not been submitted. However, following submission of a FRA they withdrew their objection. They now find the proposal acceptable subject the inclusion of a planning condition that the development is carried out in accordance with the submitted FRA. Subject to such a condition the proposal is considered acceptable in this respect.

Other matters

103. A representation has been received stating that the red edge is incorrect in the south east corner of the site. This has been raised with the agent. They have confirmed that the red edge on the site plans did erroneously include a small triangular area that was in a separate ownership. They have, therefore, submitted a revised site and location plan with the red edges amended to omit the area not within the ownership of the applicant.

CIL

104. The development would be CIL liable if approved subject to the CIL Charge for Convenience Retail and All Other Uses.

CONCLUSION

105. While it is considered that some aspects of the proposal can be controlled via conditions, the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt which is, by definition, harmful to it. Substantial weight is given to this harm to the Green Belt. The very special circumstances put forward by the applicant are noted and have been thoroughly considered but on balance it is not considered that they outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. The application is, therefore, recommended for refusal.

RELEVANT POLICIES: In accordance with s.38 (6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), the application is to be determined in accordance with the development plan (the Central

Lancashire Core Strategy, the Adopted Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 and adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance), unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Consideration of the proposal has had regard to guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the development plan. The specific policies/ guidance considerations are contained within the body of the report.