



North Norfolk District Council
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RUNTON - PF/21/0694 - Change of use of land to provide for the siting of eight holiday lodges for use as guest accommodation in association with The Links Hotel; provision of infrastructure and pedestrian links to the hotel and parking, at The Links Hotel, Sandy Lane, West Runton, Cromer, Norfolk, NR27 9QH

Minor Development:

Target Date: 13th September 2021

Extension of time 31 March 2022

Case Officer: Mr Phillip Rowson

Local member: Cllr Sarah Butikofer

Full Planning Permission

SITE CONSTRAINTS:

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Undeveloped Coast

County Wildlife Site (CWS)

Countryside

Mineral Safeguarding Area

Article 4 Direction

Area of Archaeological Significance

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

PF/14/0775 - Erection of first floor and two-storey extensions to provide additional bedroom, spa and treatment facilities - Approved 10/10/2014

PF/17/0100 - Erection of 6 holiday lodges within woodland belt, and construction of new access road – Refused 06/04/2017

PF/21/0694 - Change of use of land to provide for the siting of eight holiday lodges for use as guest accommodation in association with The Links Hotel provision of infrastructure and pedestrian links to the hotel.

THE APPLICATION

The primary objective of the proposal is to sustain and diversify the offering at the hotel to provide accommodation for extended family groups in the form of a small group of eight holiday lodges on the Golf Course. Each lodge would provide an entrance hall, living and tea kitchen (inc. oven, sink and fridge), two bedrooms, a bathroom and private outside amenity area. The Lodges would have full access to the facilities of the hotel. All car parking is located at the hotel; guest would walk to lodges or be served via Golf Carts to enable luggage to be moved. No guest vehicular access is proposed to the lodges.

To facilitate the proposals, layout changes are intended to the golf course, additional planting alongside the lodges is proposed to soften impacts of the development. The proposal also includes revised plans relating to catch netting for safety of lodge users and provision of a drainage strategy to ensure adequate foul and surface water facilities.

In addition to a full set of detailed plans, and supporting letters the applicant has provided the following supporting documents:

- Landscape visual impact assessment
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement
- Ecological impact
- Planning statement
- Supporting letters reasons for business diversification

REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

Cllr Sarah Bütikofer: The proposal remains contrary to policy as it is located in the AONB, and should be called to Committee on this basis.

PARISH COUNCIL

Runton Parish Council

Original plans comment:

Runton Parish Council **OBJECTS** to the proposed development believing that it could potentially create danger from users of the golf course, it is inappropriately sited and is contrary to a number of the Planning Authority Policies as follows:

Policies:

- (a) EC3 - Extensions to existing businesses in the countryside;
- (b) EC7 Location of new tourism development;
- (c) EN1 Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- (d) EN2 Protection and enhancement of landscape and settlement character;
- (e) EN3 Undeveloped coast;
- (f) EN4 Design;
- (g) EN8 Protecting and enhancing the historic environment;

Other reasons for objections are:

It is an area of archaeological significance.

It would create a precedent for future further development in a sensitive area.

Amended plans comment:

Runton Parish Council **OBJECTS** to the construction of these holiday lodges.

The alteration in the proposal and the reduction of number of lodges fails to address the potential violation of matters listed in principal policies, concerning; economic EC3, and EC7 and landscape policies EN1, EN2, and EN3.

Regarding the environment and wildlife, the road between the proposed lodges and the nearby pond is a migration route for the Common Toad. Additional traffic will be detrimental to this. The species, being a biodiversity priority species, should be considered during the

consideration of the application.

We believe there is also a health and safety risk for residents during, and subsequently after, the building of the lodges if the proposal were to be passed.

The Parish Council does not accept the justification of making an economic case for these lodges as relevant. There are many other measures that could be taken to mitigate the financial situation at the complex such as different types of membership for the golf club for the wider community and/or a re-design of the existing hotel itself, instead of inflicting this development on the AONB.

CONSULTATIONS:

Norfolk Coast Partnership:

Original Plans:

We the Norfolk Coast Partnership who manage the Norfolk Coast AONB wish to **OBJECTS** to the proposal for 9 holiday lodges at the Links Hotel, West Runton. We have a number of concerns outlined below.

AONBs were originally established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, though the legislation was reformulated in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Section 85 of the Act contains a general duty on all relevant authorities to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving or enhancing the natural beauty' of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas. Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the 'duty of regard'. The site lies on the boundary of the AONB where impacts need to still be as carefully measured as if they were inside. NPPF para 172 is quite clear that 'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues'. A proposal of this kind sited in the countryside with associated increases in noise, traffic, light and movement will not serve to either conserve, or enhance the AONB.

The proposal lies in the Coastal Towns and Villages area of the Landscape Character Assessment for the AONB. Undeveloped rural areas help to provide a strong landscape setting for the settlements here. A key force for change includes increasing infill development which may remove opportunities for open space and other prominent features within settlements and degrade the quality of views (both externally looking into settlements and internally looking out) Inleborough Hill is a prominent vantage point and there will be added visual disturbance from the lodges and lighting at night.

Dark skies are a special feature of the AONB mentioned in the Management Plan under Sense of Remoteness, Tranquillity and Wildness. This is an especially dark area of the AONB. The Norfolk Coast boasts some of the darkest skies in the country. The lack of artificial light helps the coast retain its rural character and overall tranquillity.

Policy EN1 States that development should not detract from the special qualities of the AONB. Nocturnal character, landscape character and the special qualities of the area are outlined in EN2. The proposal contravenes both these policies as well as PB3 from the AONB

Management Plan, 'Ensure that new development, including changes to existing buildings and infrastructure, within their ownership or powers of regulation are consistent with the special qualities of the area and relevant conservation objectives'.

I believe the proposal is in the Undeveloped Coast area of which there is conflict with EN3 as there will be impact to the character of the area and it is not replacing facilities lost or threatened to be lost to coastal erosion.

One of the original reasons for refusal was that the lodges were isolated from the building. The new proposed lodges are at some distance from the hotel and are at odds with other buildings nearby. There are also 'limited facilities' (para 3.5 in the planning statement) in each lodge which constitutes un-serviced holiday accommodation. This contravenes EC 7 'Proposals for new build un-serviced holiday accommodation in the Countryside will be treated as though they are permanent residential dwellings and will not be permitted'. Therefore, some of the original concerns on the last application have not been addressed.

There will still be a significant detrimental impact to the special qualities of the AONB and wider undeveloped coastal landscape character, which is very open from the south, east and west. There is also the potential impact on archaeology which doesn't look to have been covered.

It is not within our remit to cover issues such as heritage, drainage, overlooking or access however there does seem to be constraints and local concerns raised about these issues including that significant work has already started prior to decision.

There has been mention in the Planning Statement about the government's commitment to sustainable development however The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, which include AONBs, commensurate with their statutory status. Furthermore, it should be recognised that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' does not automatically apply within AONBs, as confirmed by paragraph 11 and footnote 6, due to other policies relating to AONBs elsewhere within the Framework.

Clearly it was decided during the last application that further growth here would be detrimental to the special qualities of the AONB, the latest reiteration has not addressed these concerns and the structures, associated movement, traffic, lighting and domestic paraphernalia will add visual disturbance. It should be noted that one of the original reasons for the designation of this AONB was the surge of holiday sites that was threatening areas of high quality landscape, and the concern that over time this would erode the special qualities for which the AONB was subsequently designated.

We are not against investment and growth in the area, but this has to be carefully balanced with the impact this has on the landscape which also has value and is the reason visitors come and that we have such a vibrant tourist economy. Therefore, we object because there will be a detrimental impact to the special qualities of the AONB and that the public benefit of the lodges will not outweigh this impact.

Amended plans:

Confirm no change in position – **OBJECTION MAINTAINED**, the development does not preserve or enhance the AONB.

Network Rail: Advisory comments

The developer must ensure that their proposal, both during construction and after completion does not:

- Encroach onto Network Rail land
- Affect the safety, operation or integrity of the company's railway and its infrastructure
- Undermine its support zone
- Damage the company's infrastructure
- Place additional load on cuttings
- Adversely affect any railway land or structure
- Over-sail or encroach upon the airspace of any Network Rail land
- Cause to obstruct or interfere with any works or proposed works or Network Rail development both now and in the future.

Where required, the developer should provide (at their own expense) and thereafter maintain a substantial, trespass proof fence along the development side of the existing boundary fence, to a minimum height of 1.8 metres.

NCC Public rights of way: No Objection

We have no objection in principle to the application. However, we would highlight that access to the site will be via the Public Right of Way known as Runton Restricted Byway 4 which does not offer any means of public vehicular access and it is not maintainable at the public expense to a vehicular standard. It would be expected that any damage caused to the Restricted Byway by the exercise of the private rights remains with the rights holders to repair.

The full legal extent of this Restricted Byway must remain open and accessible for the duration of the development and subsequent occupation.

NCC Highways: No Objection subject to conditions

Thank you for the revised consultation received recently relating to the above development proposal, which sets out the layout of 127 spaces around the site however, the longitudinal spaces would usually be required to be 6m in length to allow access to and from the spaces, which would result in a reduction in numbers by 2-3 spaces, although this would not cause any ongoing concerns.

As such, I am able to comment that in relation to highways issues only, as this proposal does not affect the current traffic patterns or the free flow of traffic that Norfolk County Council does not wish to resist the grant of consent.

Should your Authority be minded to the grant of consent, I would seek to append the following conditions to any consent notice issued:-

SHC 21 - Prior to the first use of the development hereby permitted the proposed on-site car parking/servicing/loading/unloading/turning/waiting area shall be laid out, demarcated, levelled, surfaced and drained in accordance with the approved plan and retained thereafter available for that specific use.

Reason: To ensure the permanent availability of the parking/manoeuvring areas, in the interests of satisfactory development and highway safety.

NNDC Environmental Health: Objection

- no measures in place to protect the proposed lodges, and occupants from golf ball collisions.
- insufficient information on how foul drainage will be managed on site. A septic tank will be used to deal with foul water drainage, but no further information has been submitted to demonstrate that adequate tank capacity will be available to cope with the associated demand.
- the potential for light pollution to surrounding properties, the application does not contain sufficient information to address these concerns.

NNDC Landscape Officer: Objection

Identifying adverse impacts arising from development, failure to comply with Core Strategy Policy and NPPF as detailed in the considerations below. Consider historic reasons for refusal relating to adjacent site are not satisfied.

The amendments submitted in Dec 2021 show a revised layout (Context Site Plan, Dwg 0153 Rev E 25/10/2021 and Proposed Site Plan, Dwg 0150 Rev E, 25/10/2021). The revisions show the number of lodges reduced from 8 to 7 with the westernmost lodge removed. The remaining lodges are now all of the larger variety (50m² footprint as opposed to the inclusion of two smaller lodges that were 41m²).

The Landscape section acknowledges that the landscape and visual impact of the lodges has been proportionately reduced by the removal of one lodge, but remain of the opinion that this development will cause landscape and visual harm in the prominent open landscape of this part of the Norfolk Coast AONB which has limited capacity to accommodate an intensive development such as that proposed.

Albeit marginally less, the development will still intrude on views to Beeston Bump and the coast from Inleborough Hill, a noted and valued landmark within the AONB. It will encroach onto the open land of the golf course which has previously been highlighted as making up some of the important remaining areas of open space that maintain visual separation between settlements in this Coastal Shelf Landscape Type. Local Plan Policy EN2: Protection and Enhancement of Landscape and Settlement Character specifically cites 'protection, conservation and enhancement of gaps between settlements and their landscape setting', as a design parameter and the revised development fails to achieve this.

Despite the low level lighting that is proposed, the development will incur light pollution and will introduce built form, human activity and disturbance into the open grassland adjacent to the golf course. 3m high acoustic fencing is still shown on the Context Site Plan, though it is understood that this is not now part of the scheme. Clarification is required as to the specification for the treatment of the boundary with the railway, as this will be a prominent feature of the scheme.

Additionally, it is understood that Environmental Health have requested safety measures to ensure there is no encroachment from golf balls into the area of the lodges and that this may be in the form of safety netting. This also needs to be detailed up and clearly shown on a Site

Plan as this will be another incongruous feature in the open landscape setting.

The Site Plan relies on two rows of existing 5-10ft and 20ft trees as part of the landscape mitigation (approx. 46 trees are shown). There are some existing young trees on the site, but not this number and not at the spacing's shown. The trees are of varying species, age and height and are generally not of high quality and have no protection guards or stakes. The linear arrangement is somewhat incongruous and will do little to mitigate the impact of the lodges or to enhance the local landscape setting. It will also be difficult to maintain since some of the trees are within the close mown fairway. The landscape mitigation also proposes new copses of trees within the open golf course and individual trees in and around the lodges. A more strategic planting scheme wrapping much more vegetation closely around the lodges would be more effective and would contain new planting on the edge of the golf course, rather than intrude into the open space that is valued as contributing to the 'gaps between settlements' that is a noted feature of this Coastal Shelf Landscape Type. The proposed new copses sited south of the fairway will be barely visible from Inceborough Hill and will therefore serve little purpose in diminishing the visual impact of the lodges.

The LVIA conclusion has not altered and remains a Medium to High Adverse Effect on the landscape resource and character before the mitigation planting is established, leading to a Slight Adverse effect after 15 years of establishment. 15 years is a considerable period of time and this duration needs to be weighed into the planning balance. In relation to visual amenity, a Moderate-Slight Adverse Visual Effect is predicted. The Landscape section agree with the conclusion that there would be a residual adverse landscape and visual effect as a result of the development. Furthermore, as discussed above, the proposed and recent planting is not considered to be suitably designed to achieve effective mitigation.

Aside from conflict with principle policy issues (EC3 and EC7), the Landscape section therefore conclude that the proposal remains contrary to EN1, EN2 and EN3 and para 176 of the NPPF, such that 'great weight' is afforded within the planning balance to the identified landscape and visual harm in consideration of all aspects of the proposal..

Final comments regarding amended plans March 22 will be given via update prior to the meeting.

NNDC Economic Development Officer: Supports

The Links Hotel is one of three hotels in North Norfolk that are owned by the Mackenzie Hotel group. Collectively it is understood that they employ 130 FTE jobs, generate £4.8million in turnover and have a wage bill of over £1.5million pound. It can be reasonably expected that much of this is likely to be retained within the local economy and that the hotel group yields not only a healthy level of direct jobs, but also makes a notable contribution in terms of both indirect and induced jobs and spend to the local economy.

Traditionally the local make up of holiday accommodation in North Norfolk was dominated by independent hotels and Bed and Breakfast providers. However, over the last decade the visitor accommodation market has substantially changed, with visitors expecting more choice and a wider range of quality offerings. Moreover, the Airbnb phenomena and the ease with which holidaymakers can make better-informed choices and book directly with enterprising alternative accommodation providers, has further threatened the traditional hotel model. As such, North Norfolk has seen a number of hotels exit the market in recent years,

typically because the costs of maintaining the accommodation is such that the business is no longer viable.

It is to this context that the economic benefits of this planning proposal should be considered. In particular we wish to highlight the following points:

- The new lodges will be of a high standard, allowing a more flexible use of space (indoor and outdoor) than the main hotel, which will potentially attract families and larger groups who might otherwise be harder to accommodate within the constraints of the existing hotel accommodation but who may still wish to benefit from the range of on-site facilities such as the gym, pool and spa. As such, this represents a more diversified offer which will potentially help towards the sustainability of the business. Moreover, it is considered that this diversification will thus potentially help to sustain the existing jobs and we are advised that the proposal will also create an additional 6 FTE roles.
- The lodges will have an interdependence on the hotel, and limited cooking facilities will mean that residents will use both the hotel's restaurant and likely other local food establishments.
- It is also recognised that there are wider potential economic benefits, beyond the business case that would be derived by such a proposal – such as jobs in the construction phase, supporting the local supply chain, local spend from visitors etc. - which would serve the wider business community within the area.

Final comments regarding amended plans and information from March 22 will be given via update prior to the meeting.

REPRESENTATIONS:

At the time of report compilation 45 letters of objection, 3 letters raising comment and 23 letters of support are recorded.

Objections raising the following points amongst others;

(Listed by number of times raised in letters received):

- Adverse landscape impact, with specific concerns also received about views from Ingleborough Hill over the appeal site to the wider AONB; inappropriate mitigation.
- Impacts on local amenity by loss of privacy, and noise generation
- Adverse effects for light pollution in AONB and Undeveloped Coast policy areas
- Health and Safety conflicts between Golf Course users and Occupiers of Lodges
- Increase in traffic flows associated with use
- Surface water flows and disposal of foul water discharge
- Ecological impacts on amphibian, snake and bat colonies
- Inappropriate precedent created
- Archaeological impact
- Poor design and materials used in lodges
- Lodges are not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant

Other material issues raised in objections include the adequacy of car parking for lodge users. The control and management of gorse on Ingleborough Hill, which mitigates impact on views

to AONB, is not within the applicant's management. Inaccurate landscaping plans. Questioning business viability issues raised by the applicant. The previous reasons for refusal on adjacent site still apply.

A number of objections raised matters of planning policy compliance with the following core strategy policies: SS1, EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4, EN8, EN9, EC3, EC7. In addition, the emerging AONB partnership policies BE7 & 8 were considered by conflicted by the proposals.

Comments:

Works have commenced on site the proposals are retrospective. No commercial right of way exists to the lodges; safety of rail line will be impacted.

Supporting comments raising the following points amongst others:

(listed by number of times raised in letters received):

- The proposals provide a boost to local holiday accommodation, and diversify the District's accommodation offer
- The accommodation will be DDA compliant
- Jobs are created and retained
- The proposals support facilities at the Hotel that are open to the wider community
- There will be wider economic benefits associated with the lodges to local businesses

Final comments regarding amended plans received March 22 will be given via update prior to the meeting.

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

It is considered that the proposed development may raise issues relevant to

Article 8: The Right to respect for private and family life.

Article 1 of the First Protocol: The right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions.

Having considered the likely impact on an individual's Human Rights, and the general interest of the public, refusal of this application as recommended is considered to be justified, proportionate and in accordance with planning law.

CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998 - SECTION 17

The application raises no significant crime and disorder issues.

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In making its recommendation, the Local Planning Authority have given due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

STANDING DUTIES:

Due regard has been given to the following additional duties:

Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 (S40)
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (R9)
Planning Act 2008 (S183)
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (S66(1) and S72)

Local Finance Considerations:

Under Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 the council is required when determining planning applications to have regard to any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application. Local finance considerations are not considered to be material to this case.

RELEVANT POLICIES

North Norfolk Core Strategy (Adopted September 2008):

SS1 – Spatial Strategy for North Norfolk
SS2 – Development in Countryside
SS4 – Environment
SS5 – Economy

EN1 – Norfolk Coast (AONB)
EN2 – Protection and Enhancement of Landscape and Settlement Character
EN3 – Undeveloped Coast
EN4 – Design
EN6 – Sustainable Design
EN8 – Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment
EN9 – Biodiversity and Geology
EN10 – Development & Flood Risk

EC3 – Extension to Existing Businesses in the Countryside
EC7 – The Location of New Tourism Development

CT5 – The Transport Impact of New Development
CT6 – Parking Provision

Material Considerations:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021):

- Chapter 1 – Building a strong and competitive economy
- Chapter 3 – Supporting a prosperous rural economy
- Chapter 7 – Requiring good design
- Chapter 11 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Chapter 12 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

The North Norfolk Local Plan (Reg 19) submission

The Council's new Local Plan has been subject to Reg 19 consultation which closed on 07 March 2022. The Local Plan carries limited weight at this stage in decision making terms.

MAIN ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1. Principle**
- 2. Landscape & AONB**
- 3. Biodiversity & Habitat**
- 4. Economic Development**
- 5. Local Amenity**
- 6. Highways**
- 7. Drainage**
- 8. Design**

1. Principle (Policies SS1, SS2, SS5, EC3, EC7)

The application site lies within a rural location on the periphery of the village, on land designated as 'Countryside' under Core Strategy Policy SS 1. Policy SS 2 limits the types of development to those requiring a rural location, with the principle of 'recreation and tourism development (such as that being proposed) supported, subject to compliance with other local and national planning policies. Policy SS4 requires proposals to be environmentally sustainable, protecting natural and environmental assets. Policy SS5 supports tourism development, by diversifying the tourism offer and extending the season.

Policy EC3 seeks to permit extensions to existing business in the countryside, subject to criteria based on scale and impact. Policy EC7 deals specifically with controlling the location of new tourism development, requiring a sequential approach to its location. Specific reference made to locational strategy and introducing restriction on new build un-serviced holiday accommodation in the Countryside.

The strategic policies SS1, SS2 and SS5 seek to guide development to appropriate locations within the district by considering compliance or otherwise with the criteria laid out. The strategic policies do not rule out development such as that proposed.

A wide range of development management policies also apply to these proposals; strategically it is those policies that relate to business and tourism that should be considered as matters of principle.

Under policy, (EC3) it is reasonable to consider the proposals as an extension of the existing business "The Links Country Park Hotel". However, the lodges are set apart from the main body of accommodation and will need detailed consideration as to landscape / AONB impacts and the functional relationship to the main business in terms landscape criteria in this policy and wider development management policies.

Further consideration arises under policy EC7 on tourism development, the lodges will not be entirely un-serviced accommodation (parking, transport connection, leisure and dining facilities are available at the main body of the hotel); conditional control can be used to ensure the lodges are retained as part of the same business unit. West Runton is an accessible coastal village within the hinterland of coastal resorts. The applicant considers in their planning statement that all other accessible sites to "The Links Country Park Hotel" is considered and this is therefore the sequentially preferred site for development. The proposals are broadly compliant with policy EC7, I shall return to matters of detail within the wider development management assessment.

2. Landscape & AONB (Policies EN1, EN2 & EN3)

Landscape character is considered in the Norfolk Coast AONB Integrated Landscape Guidance; the site being within the defined Landscape Type Coastal Towns and Villages (CTV) 2: Sheringham to Overstrand. An inherent sensitivity within this landscape are the remaining undeveloped rural areas, which are found within an otherwise developed coastline and which separate and provide a strong landscape setting for the settlements. Key areas for consideration are development proposals on the fringes of the existing settlements which may erode important areas of separation. The vantage points of Beeston Bump and Inleborough Hill are recognised, priority being given to the conservation and enhancement of undeveloped rural land on or close to the cliff-tops. Design controls are to be considered for lighting of camp sites and larger commercial developments. Opportunities should be taken in any new development proposals to anchor development with appropriate landscaping to existing hedgerow and landscape features.

The North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment 2021, is NNDC's supplementary Planning Guidance to support development management decisions. The site is within the classification Coastal Shelf LCA (CS1). Defining characteristics are:

- *Dramatic and distinctive topography*
- *An eroding coastline*
- *Tourism and leisure-related settlement and land use along the coast*
- *Differing settlement character of Cromer and Sheringham*
- *Open farmland and semi natural habitats provide important biodiversity and visual separation between settlements*
- *More open character at the eastern end of the coastal shelf*
- *Less developed character at the western end of the coastal shelf*
- *Busy road network*
- *Panoramic views of the coast and wooded glacial ridge"*

Specifically in relation to this development, the landscape strategy should seek opportunities to:

- better integrate existing development, such as cliff-top caravan parks, through appropriate landscape enhancement and management and/or changes in the developed form.
- Conserve the valuable undeveloped areas between coastal settlements, to maintain a clear sense of leaving one settlement before arriving at the next.
- Carefully manage the location of any development, which would detract from distinctive skyline features or from views across undeveloped landscapes from the Cromer Ridge to the coast or vice-versa.

The application is supported by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and planning statement. The applicants planning statement considers that previous reasons for refusal associated with landscape / AONB impacts that resulted in refusal of application ref: PF/17/0100 have now been addressed in this application.

The LVIA submission considers those impacts in more detail. The document considered:

“...moving the lodges east to be more visually associated with the adjacent residential properties as well as “significant” new tree planting and habitat creation. Repositioning the lodges will limit the perception of any extension of

development between the existing dwellings and the eastern edge of the West Runton. Long term the mitigation planting will enable the lodges, the railway line and adjacent properties to be better screened in views from Ingleborough Hill and therefore better absorbed into the landscape.”

The LVIA accurately refers to the location of the application site and its context within the immediate setting of the Golf Course, rail line and adjacent dwellings located north of the rail line. The wider setting of the AONB, the landforms of Ingleborough Hill and Beeston Bump are then considered. The LVIA then considers the site and wider landscape character, and statutory designations. The site is located as an “untidy” strip of land between the rail line and golf course; screening from views to the west by blocks of mature planting is present. The site is contained; limited views of the site are generally available. However, significant localised views are available in the immediate context with near neighbours, the golf course, and public footpath and from Ingleborough Hill.

The LVIA finds views from Ingleborough Hill over the site as having a *High level of visual amenity (with some detractors, existing caravan sites etc...)*, as being set apart from the general Fair visual amenity afforded to the site. It is found that the site has a medium to high ability to accommodate development, but that the AONB location gives a high sensitivity to the impacts arising from development. It is concluded that a Medium to High Adverse Effect is created on the landscape resource and landscape character. When mitigation takes effect this impact is reduced to a Slight Adverse Effect overall, with the new landscape elements leading to an overall improvement in the character of the area. The LVIA notes that mitigation is considered to be fully effective fifteen years plus after first planting. The greatest impact of the proposals would be upon users of Ingleborough Hill, the report notes that in the longer-term lead to an improvement in views from the hill towards Beeston Bump and the coastal shelf by screening the proposed / existing ribbon development and railway line.

The Council’s landscape officer has considered these proposals over three iterations, providing advice and considering mitigation through that process. The location of the lodges broadly remains 300m from the hotel; such separation of the lodges remains a landscape concern. The potential for light pollution also remains a concern. Some tree loss is required to accommodate the development (a group of willow and 11 mixed species trees).

The Site Plan relies on two rows of existing 5-10ft and 20ft trees as part of the landscape mitigation (approx. 46 trees are shown). On the ground the number and spacing of trees is not as shown. The applicant is required to review and clarify this point. The trees planted are of varying species, age / height; they are generally not of high quality and have limited protection from guards and stakes. The linear arrangement is incongruous providing limited mitigation of the impact from the lodges. It does little to enhance the local landscape setting. It will also be difficult to maintain since some of the trees are within the close mown fairway. The landscape mitigation also proposes new copses of trees within the open golf course and individual trees in and around the lodges. A more strategic planting scheme wrapping much more vegetation closely around the lodges would be more effective and would contain new planting on the edge of the golf course, rather than intrude into the open space that is valued as contributing to the ‘gaps between settlements’ that is a noted feature of this Coastal Shelf Landscape Type. The proposed new copses sited south of the fairway will be barely visible from Ingleborough Hill and will therefore serve little purpose in diminishing the visual impact of the lodges.

As noted above the site is within the Norfolk Coast AONB, conservation and enhancement of

the asset is afforded great weight under NPPF paragraph 176. The scale development would be highly visible from key vantage points on Inceborough Hill, a well-known and highly valued local viewpoint being one of the highest points in the area, as well as when viewed from the west, south and east of the site. Within the context of existing local development, the lodges would extend development beyond the rail line into undeveloped land. This land contributes to open land extending from Inceborough Hill to the coastal cliff edge. In combination, this area contributes towards the sense of separation between areas of built form and the Undeveloped Coast. This open character is a key defining element to the landscape character. The proposed development is contrary to the aims North Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment (CS1) that seeks to retention of a degree of separation between settlements with small discreet areas of farmland, woodland, heath and other open spaces (commons & golf courses) a key valued feature.

Despite the low level lighting that is proposed, the development will incur light pollution and will introduce built form, human activity and disturbance into the open grassland adjacent to the golf course. Clarification is required as to the specification for the treatment of the boundary with the railway, as this will be a prominent feature of the scheme. Boundary treatment and security netting have potential to add adverse landscape and visual impact.

Most recent amendments include the addition of safety netting and potential for trellis to be erected to provide a safe environment for future lodges users in relation to the immediately adjacent Golf Course. The addition of these measures exacerbates the impact of the development in the short and medium term, i.e. before mitigation has become established to screen those additional measures.

Further amendments are made to introduce a pumping station and associated trenching, in close proximity to retained trees, the Arboricultural Impact Assessment would require amendment to demonstrate no adverse impact on Root Protection Areas.

The LVIA is not amended to include the revised landscaping information. However, it concludes a medium to high adverse effect, leading to a slight adverse effect once planting is established. In relation to visual amenity, a moderate-slight adverse visual effect is predicted. The sensitive open setting within the designated AONB landscape has a limited capacity to accommodate such development. Policy EN2 specifically cites 'protection, conservation and enhancement of gaps between settlements and their landscape setting', as a design parameter. Advice from officers is that even with updated landscaping being consider that the balance of probability is that these proposals fail to comply with policy ENV2.

The proposals remain contrary to Core Strategy Policies EN1, EN2 and EN3. In consideration of all policy issues relevant to this application, NPPF para 176 is also engaged, requiring that 'great weight' is afforded to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB landscape.

3. Biodiversity & Habitat

The North Norfolk District Council Local Plan - Policy EN9 requires protection of the biodiversity value, minimising fragmentation of habitats. Development proposals should maximise opportunities for restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats; and incorporate beneficial biodiversity conservation features where appropriate.

The application is supported by an Ecology Impact Assessment. The assessment notes that the site is within an AONB location with 8 designated sites are within 2 Km, nearest sensitive receptors are Ingleborough Hill, East & West Runton Cliffs (County Wildlife Sites); along with Beeston Cliffs, Fellbrigg Woods and Beeston Common being the closest SSSI. The proposals are not within English Nature notification distances.

A range of habitats and Flora are assessed. Impacts from the development are noted, lodges and access; removal of amenity grassland (0.2Ha); removal of tress /. Replanting; culverting ditch. The report concludes the scale of development will limit impacts to designated sites. An intermediate negative impact is found at a local level, remediation and mitigation measures are noted. No significant adverse effects are predicted.

Appropriately, drafted planning conditions can be used to mitigate harm created e.g. avoidance of ground bird nesting season, reducing the impact on foraging bats via control of lighting on site. Enhancement and mitigation is offered for habitats by creation of new tree planning, bat / bird nesting boxes, new hedgerow planting and creation of a habitat pond.

On the basis of the assessment, along with enhancement and mitigation offered then the proposals are considered to comply with Policy EN9 and NPPF requirements for development to promote net gains in biodiversity.

4. Economic Development

The North Norfolk District Council Local Plan - Policy SS5 targets job growth in the plan period noting the importance of tourism accommodation to the local economy. Proposals, which help diversify the offer and extend the season, are supported. The policy is caveated in that proposals should demonstrate they would have not create significant detrimental impact on the environment.

The applicant's supporting statements identify The Links Hotel within the wider Mackenzie Group, the three hotels within the group employ 130 people (75% of jobs are full time). The Hotels generate £4.8M in turnover annually; wage bill is £1.5 Million and payments to local suppliers is £1.4M pa. The three Hotels generate £1.4 M pa in VAT, business rates and tax. The Sea Marge & The Dales are Grade II listed heritage assets, which are maintained to a high standard.

The applicant identifies that there will be positive economic effects directly from the construction of the lodges and infrastructure to local contractors. Potentially more guests will be drawn to the diversified offer, which will support the wider services and facilities offered, by the hotel.

The applicant cites two driving forces behind the proposals:

- Financial - offsetting the costs associated with maintaining the golf course in the face of declining memberships and use by guests, currently running at a loss
- Functional - changes in the nature and length of visitor stays, preference for families to travel as groups and have own space and a need to compete more effectively with self-catering accommodation.

Financial

The Golf course attached to the hotel has a membership of less than 100, an escalating cost to maintenance centres around a need for £40,000 to £50,000 pa investment in machinery with an ongoing maintenance cost of approx. £60,000 pa. This together with the staffing costs associated with the Coarse and clubhouse facility raise questions over the future & function of the course.

Analysis from 2012 onwards shows that since re-opening of The Links Hotel following liquidation the Mackenzie group have increased from 55 to 135 employees; with commensurate increase in wage bill to be £1.68M.

Functional

The Links Hotel has interconnecting family rooms, market trends are towards larger Hotel rooms and facilities. The lodges are designed to maintain serviced accommodation with direct links to hotel facilities, and services.

Nature of bookings has changed:

	Full Board	B&B	Room only
2012	40%	50%	10%
2020	10%	30%	60%

Further evidence details a modest profit projection for 2023 without the lodges in place, with an inability to invest further in the wider site or suitably maintain the asset. Projections with the proposed lodge's detail that profits can be generated which will allow investment and maintenance to be undertaken. The financial section above details the importance of investment in new machinery for the Golf Course and maintenance of facilities. It is therefore reasonably demonstrated that the applicant has a business case which requires diversification of the accommodation offer to enable investment and future maintenance of the wider hotel and golf course.

The new lodges will be of a high standard, allowing a more flexible use of space (indoor and outdoor) than the main hotel, which will potentially attract families and larger groups who might otherwise be harder to accommodate within the constraints of the existing hotel. Help towards the sustainability of the business. Moreover, it is consider that this diversification will thus potentially help to sustain the existing jobs and we are advised that the proposal will have potential to create a further 6 FTE roles.

The lodges will support the hotel via linkages to services and facilities have an interdependence with other local services and food establishments.

It is also recognised that there are wider potential economic benefits, beyond the business case that would be derived by such a proposal – such as jobs in the construction phase, supporting the local supply chain, local spend from visitors etc. - which would serve the wider business community within the area. The proposals have potential to offer support for ongoing improvements and management of the wider Links Hotel Complex.

The potential economic benefits of these proposals under policy SS5 could be afforded moderate weight within the planning balance, potentially off setting harms arising from other policy considerations.

5. Local amenity (Policies EN 4 and EN 13)

Policy EN 4 supports development proposals where they would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the residential amenity of nearby occupiers. It is noted that lodges lie beyond the rail line to the south of existing residential properties on Golf Close. The proposed lodges are single storey in nature and sit behind the raised rail line and that nearest neighbours are around 36metres from the site boundary. The proposed lodges will not have an unreasonable significant adverse impact on the privacy or amenity of existing residents or proposed occupiers of the lodges. The amended proposals include a limited outdoor area for amenity of guests. Given the separation distances and potential for a suitable management scheme condition then impacts on adjacent existing residents are mitigated appropriately.

The proposals are compliant with amenity considerations under policy EN4.

6. Highway safety (Policies CT5 and CT6)

Despite local concerns over the increase in traffic flows associated with the proposed lodges no highway safety concerns are raised by the Highway Authority.

Representations are made by NCC highways which requires a provision for (8) car parking spaces to be provided to meet highways standards for the lodges (1 space per lodge). Officers are aware that no parking will be provided at the lodges site, however sufficient land exists in and around the Hotel and its environs to allow for a prior to first use condition to be implemented for a scheme of car parking to be provided that will meet the required NCC Highways standards.

It is considered that the proposal is in accordance with the requirements of Policies CT5 and CT6.

7. Drainage (Policies EN4 & EN10)

The applicant has provided further evidence to demonstrate that the site can be effectively managed in terms of both foul and surface water drainage.

Concerns were raised regarding the use of a septic tank by Environmental Health Officers, principally with regard to poor percolation locally. The revised proposals now give details of the proposed foul water connection from the site to a connection with the existing mains sewer (adjacent to the green keepers shed). The supporting evidence details the design of the pumps proposed to discharge the waste from the holding tank to the mains sewer.

Percolation tests undertaken by the applicant demonstrate that soakaways will be effective in addressing the surface water flows arising from the proposed lodges.

Final details of the foul and surface water systems can now satisfactorily be controlled by prior to first occupancy conditions.

Subject to final comments from Environmental Health Officers it is considered that the proposals are considered to now meet requirements of Policies EN4 & EN10.

8. Design (Policy EN4)

The proposed lodges are of a ubiquitous design accommodating suitable levels of accommodation for visiting residents and with a small external area for outside seating. The proposed timber elevations will “silver” over time and reduce their immediate visual impact. Windows and doors will be powder coated aluminium. The roofing is flat but materials are not specified on plans or the supporting statement.

The layout of the site has been amended to now include 8 rather than 9 lodges. The proposals are aligned with adjacent residential development. A raft of landscaping mitigation measures are also offered to lessen the impact of the proposals in this sensitive AONB setting. The above landscape section considers that there are substantive failings within the landscape impact of the proposals. Regrettably it then follows that the proposals must also then fail the criterion requirement of policy EN4 for development to otherwise be compatible with the adopted Landscape Character Assessment.

On this basis then officers conclude that the proposals fail to comply with Policy EN4.

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The Norfolk wide Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy – (GIRAMS)

The proposals qualify to make compensatory payment under the strategy.

The Strategy enables growth in the District by implementing the required mitigation to address adverse effects on the integrity of Habitats Sites arising from recreational disturbance caused by an increased level of recreational use on internationally designated Habitat Sites, particularly European sites, through growth from all qualifying development.

The GIRAM Strategy is a strategic approach to ensure no adverse effects are caused to European sites across Norfolk, either alone or in-combination from qualifying developments. Taking a coordinated approach to mitigation has benefits and efficiencies and ensures that developers and the Local Planning Authorities (LPA) meet with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

In the event that planning permission is granted, a GI RAMS contribution of **£1487.44** would be payable to mitigate the impact of the development on European sites. Permission would have to be refused if this payment is not secured. Further consultation with Natural England would also be required given the close proximity of the development to European sites to ensure that further mitigation is not required.

Nutrient Neutrality

The application site lays beyond the identified catchment areas for either River Wensum SAC or wider Norfolk Broads SAC network as identified under Natural England Guidance issued on 16 March 2022. On this basis it is considered that the decision on the application can be progressed without the need for assessment of nutrient loading associated with the development under the Habitats Regulations.

PLANNING BALANCE & CONCLUSION

The application has given rise to numerous and wide ranging concerns from local objectors, some support has also been received and others have given neutral comments. Where possible a series of amendments have endeavoured to redesign around those concerns and also provide suitable mitigation and enhancement. The concerns raised do give some material weight both for and against the proposals and encapsulate the planning balance as discussed above.

Significance is attached to the diversification of the local tourism offer, creation of up to 6 full time jobs, wider spin off benefits in the local economy and support for ongoing improvement and maintenance of the Links Hotel Complex. The project will also give rise to economic benefits during the construction period. These are not inconsequential matters and must be afforded suitable positive weight in decision making.

A range of mitigation measures are introduced, some will have immediate short term benefits others will take longer to provide those improvements. Officers note some measures are debateable in terms of their appropriateness. Those key matters are explored and appropriate weight applied above. The overall balance on matters such as mitigation of visitor pressure, traffic flow increase, drainage, residential amenity is considered to be mitigatable and has a neutral overall impact.

The overriding and unmitigated harm arises to landscape. The AONB partnership and Council's Landscape Officer raise significant concerns over the short and medium term adverse impacts. Those concerns are moderated to an extent in the longer term but the appropriateness of the linear form of landscape planting within the wider local landscape context remains questioned in terms of appropriateness. A number of views are impacted but the most significant impacts are felt from Inceborough Hill with wider views over the AONB and undeveloped coast designations. The sensitivity of those views should not be underestimated by decision makers. The best case is for short and medium term adverse impacts for 15 years that is agreed between the applicant's adviser and officers. The longer term impacts of arguably inappropriate landscape remediation would remain.

Irrespective of further mitigation and an overview on the appropriateness of the long term landscape impact it is considered that a negative planning balance is produced. The balance is tipped by the negative short and medium term landscape impacts, which are not outweighed by economic benefits or other mitigation / enhancement arising from the proposals.

The siting of lodges on a sensitive and prominent site within the AONB results in overriding harm which cannot be appropriately mitigated or outweighed. The proposals are therefore contrary to Core Strategy Policies EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4 and NPPF para 176.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the application be REFUSED for the following reason:

The Council have considered positive weight afforded to creation of local employment, diversification of the tourism offer along with other direct and indirect benefits arising from the proposals under policy SS5 and NPPF para 84.

However the proposed lodges are sited in a sensitive and prominent site within the AONB, the impact is found to be harmful within that sensitive landscape context. It is considered that despite the economic benefits and other mitigation offered that those measures cannot outweigh the harm created to the sensitive and special landscape character. As such the proposals carry a negative planning balance and are considered contrary to policies EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4 and NPPF para 176.

Final wording of the conditions to be delegated to the Assistant Director – Planning.