



Planning Services

COMMITTEE REPORT

APPLICATION DETAILS

Application No:	DM/24/00522/FPA
Full Application Description:	Erection of part single and part two storey extension to Golf Clubhouse and Driving Range
Name of Applicant:	Mr J Adamson
Address:	Ramside Hall Golf Club, Ramside, Durham, DH1 1TD
Electoral Division:	Belmont
Case Officer:	George Spurgeon (Senior Planning Officer) Tel: 03000 261 959 Email: george.spurgeon@durham.gov.uk

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSAL

The Site

1. Ramside Hall is located to the north east of Durham City beyond the suburb of Carrville. The existing hotel and golf course are set within 48 hectares of land, part of which is formal parkland and part former agricultural land before its conversion and re-use as a golf course. The car parking areas which serve the hotel and golf club are situated to the north west and south west of the hotel buildings. The landscape of the existing golf course is of a typical parkland setting with wide open sweeps of open grassland interspersed with groups of mature trees and blocks of forestry planting. There are also a number of water features throughout the area which were created during the construction of the golf course.
2. The site is located within Durham City Green Belt and an Area of High Landscape Value as defined by the County Durham Plan. Ramside Hall itself is a Grade II listed building, and the parkland is of Local Historic Interest. There are no Public Rights of Way within the site, the closest being Pitlington Footpath No.24 which is located approximately 750m to the north of the site.
3. The wider Ramside site extends to some 40 hectares and is bound to the south-west by the disused Leamside railway line, beyond which there is housing at

Belmont. Pittington Lane runs along the north western edge of the site, separating the site from the existing Ramside Golf Course. Pittington Beck is located to the south east of the site. Agricultural land is located beyond both Pittington Beck and the north eastern section of the site.

4. The application site itself relates to the golf clubhouse building and associated driving range which is located to the south west of the centre of the wider site and extends to approximately 2.96ha. The footprint of the golf clubhouse building is approximately 1,468m², comprising a reception area, shop, changing rooms, conservatory lounge with a bar and a small kitchen, private members lounge, three separate office rooms measuring an approximate floor area of 110m², 15 driving range bays, and a swing analysis area. The golf clubhouse and its associated facilities have remained largely unchanged since its construction. The applicant has advised that 3 full time and 13 part time members of staff are currently employed in connection with the golf club.

The Proposal

5. The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a part single and part two storey extension to the golf clubhouse.
6. The proposals would see approximately 555m² of the existing clubhouse, comprising the swing analysis area and driving range bays, demolished. An extension with a floor area of approximately 2,755m² is proposed to be erected in its place which would see the introduction of a larger office suite measuring approximately 230m² located beyond the golf shop, an approximate 220m² six lane bowling alley opposite the reception area, and a two storey driving range featuring 40 individual bays. The north west elevation comprising the two storey driving range would measure 6.5m in height which does not exceed the highest part of the existing clubhouse.
7. The proposals would also allow an internal reconfiguration that would see the existing kitchen and lounge areas to be expanded, a function room introduced, and a new golf academy space provided. To accommodate this, the male and female locker rooms would be relocated to within the extension. An external terrace would also be introduced to the south west of the building to provide fire escape routes.
8. The applicant has advised that it is anticipated that the proposed development will create 12 full time equivalent employment positions in the form of two full time receptionists, a catering manager and two full time chefs, a full time maintenance worker, five part time catering staff, and four part time golf staff.
9. The application is being reported to the Central and East Area Planning Committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation as it represents major development with a proposed floor area in excess of 1000m² (approximate proposed floor area of 2,200m²).

PLANNING HISTORY

10. Ramside Hall was originally an Elizabethan House re-built in about 1820 by the Pemberton Family in the Victorian Gothic style as a Country House. It was listed

in 1967 as a building of architectural and historic interest having been acquired in 1963 in a ruinous state, by a consortium of Durham businessmen who redeveloped it as a hotel. The hotel opened in 1964 with 12 bedrooms, a restaurant and grill, and one meeting room. A series of developments of the original property have since taken place during the last 60 years to expand the hotel and establish the golf course and other facilities.

11. The site of the existing golf course benefits from a planning permission (89/00517) from October 1989 which permitted the use of the site together with other land adjacent and surrounding Ramside Hall Hotel for use as a 27 hole golf course.
12. An extension to existing golf club house to provide additional changing facilities, lounge bar, shop, office, and reception area and two additional driving range bays (4/98/00002/FPA) was approved in March 1998.
13. In addition to the above, outline planning permission (04/00836/OUT) for the extended golf course, ballroom redevelopment, and bedroom/leisure facility extension was granted in March 2005. A subsequent reserved matters application to extend the golf course to 36 holes (06/00494/RM) was approved in March 2008, while reserved matters and listed building consent for the leisure facility (08/00196/RM and 08/00197/LB) were approved in April 2008, reserved matters and listed building consent for the bedroom extension (06/00186/RM and 06/00375/LB) were approved in May 2006, and finally, reserved matters and listed building consent for the redevelopment of the ballroom (08/00198/RM and 08/00199/LB and 4/09/00686/LB) were approved in July 2007.
14. Outline application 11/00006/OUT with details of access to be considered and all other matters reserved for the erection of 34 dwellings as enabling development to facilitate the redevelopment and expansion of Ramside Hall Hotel was approved in July 2012. The reserved matters for 18 dwellings were subsequently approved.
15. A first floor extension to the hotel spa building (DM/15/00917/FPA and DM/15/00918/LB) was approved in May 2015.
16. The partial demolition and extension of the ballroom, including new W.C. facilities, entrance and rooflights (DM/16/00933/FPA) were approved in July 2016.
17. The erection of an outdoor padel tennis court on grassland adjacent to existing Hydrotherapy Pool building (DM/21/03000/FPA) was approved in October 2021.
18. The erection of six woodland lodges (DM/20/02918/FPA and DM/22/01940/FPA) were approved in February 2021 and November 2022.
19. The extension of the existing green keepers building to provide additional garage/equipment storage (DM/19/03758/FPA) was approved in January 2020.

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy

20. A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2023. The overriding message continues to be that new development that is sustainable should go ahead without delay. It defines the role of planning in achieving sustainable development under three overarching objectives – economic, social and environmental, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.
21. *NPPF Part 2 Achieving Sustainable Development* - The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and therefore at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It defines the role of planning in achieving sustainable development under three overarching objectives - economic, social and environmental, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development for plan-making and decision-taking is outlined.
22. *NPPF Part 4 Decision-making* - Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
23. *NPPF Part 6 Building a Strong, Competitive Economy* - The Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, building on the country's inherent strengths, and to meeting the twin challenges of global competition and a low carbon future.
24. *NPPF Part 7 - Ensuring the vitality of town centres*. Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period.
25. *NPPF Part 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport* - Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion. Developments that generate significant movement should be located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes maximised.
26. *NPPF Part 12 Achieving Well-Designed Places* - The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, with good design a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning.
27. *NPPF Part 13 - Protecting Green Belt Land* - The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. 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. Green Belt land serves 5 purposes; to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; to preserve the setting of

historic towns; and to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

28. *NPPF Part 14 Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change* - The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
29. *NPPF Part 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment* - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment. The Planning System should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests, recognising the wider benefits of ecosystems, minimising the impacts on biodiversity, preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from pollution and land stability and remediating contaminated or other degraded land where appropriate.
30. *NPPF Part 16 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*. Heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

National Planning Practice Guidance:

31. The Government has consolidated a number of planning practice guidance notes, circulars and other guidance documents into a single Planning Practice Guidance Suite. This document provides planning guidance on a wide range of matters. Of particular relevance to this application is the practice guidance with regards to; air quality; historic environment; design process and tools; determining a planning application; flood risk; healthy and safe communities; land affected by contamination; housing and economic development needs assessments; housing and economic land availability assessment; light pollution; natural environment; noise; public rights of way and local green space; planning obligations; use of planning conditions; and; water supply, wastewater and water quality.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

Local Plan Policy:

The County Durham Plan (CDP)

32. *Policy 7 (Visitor Attractions)* supports the provision of new, or the expansion of existing attractions, provided they are: in sustainable and accessible locations or can be made so; are appropriate to site's location in terms of scale, design, layout and materials; can demonstrate viability of new attraction or helps

support viability of existing attraction; enhances existing attractions and supports the visitor economy.

Where a countryside location is required, development should: meet identified visitor needs; support local employment and community services; ensure adequate infrastructure; and respect the character of the countryside.

33. *Policy 8 (Visitor Accommodation)* supports new and extensions to visitor accommodation provided it is appropriate to the scale and character of the area and not used for permanent residential occupation. In the countryside such accommodation would also need to meet an identified need, support business viability (if an extension) and demonstrate how the location can be made sustainable.
34. *Policy 9 (Retail Hierarchy and Town Centre Development)* seeks to protect and enhance the hierarchy of Sub Regional, Large Town, Small Town, District and Local retail centres in the County.
35. *Policy 10 (Development in the Countryside)* states that development will not be permitted unless allowed for by specific policies in the Plan or Neighbourhood Plan or unless it relates to exceptions for development necessary to support economic development, infrastructure development or development of existing buildings. The policy further sets out nine General Design Principles for all development in the Countryside.
36. *Policy 20 (Green Belt)* states that development proposals within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national planning policy. There is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out several exceptions as well as other forms of development which may be inappropriate in the Green Belt.
37. *Policy 21 (Delivering Sustainable Transport)* requires all development to deliver sustainable transport by: delivering, accommodating and facilitating investment in sustainable modes of transport; providing appropriate, well designed, permeable and direct routes for all modes of transport; ensuring that any vehicular traffic generated by new development can be safely accommodated; creating new or improvements to existing routes and assessing potential increase in risk resulting from new development in vicinity of level crossings. Development should have regard to Parking and Accessibility Supplementary Planning Document 2023.
38. *Policy 27 (Utilities, Telecommunications and Other Broadcast Infrastructure)* requires all residential and commercial development to be served by a high-speed broadband connection, where this is not appropriate, practical or economically viable developers should provide appropriate infrastructure to enable future installation.
39. *Policy 29 (Sustainable Design)* requires all development proposals to achieve well designed buildings and places having regard to SPD advice and sets out 18 elements for development to be considered acceptable, including: making positive contribution to areas character, identity etc.; adaptable buildings; minimising greenhouse gas emissions and use of non-

renewable resources; providing high standards of amenity and privacy; contributing to healthy neighbourhoods; and suitable landscape proposals.

40. *Policy 31 (Amenity and Pollution)* sets out that development will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there will be no unacceptable impact, either individually or cumulatively, on health, living or working conditions or the natural environment and that they can be integrated effectively with any existing business and community facilities. Development will not be permitted where inappropriate odours, noise, vibration and other sources of pollution cannot be suitably mitigated against, as well as where light pollution is not suitably minimised. Permission will not be granted for sensitive land uses near to potentially polluting development.
41. *Policy 32 (Despoiled, Degraded, Derelict, Contaminated and Unstable Land)* requires that where development involves such land, any necessary mitigation measures to make the site safe for local communities and the environment are undertaken prior to the construction or occupation of the proposed development and that all necessary assessments are undertaken by a suitably qualified person.
42. *Policy 35 (Water Management)* requires all development proposals to consider the effect of the proposed development on flood risk, both on-site and off-site, commensurate with the scale and impact of the development and taking into account the predicted impacts of climate change for the lifetime of the proposal. All new development must ensure there is no net increase in surface water runoff for the lifetime of the development. Amongst its advice, the policy advocates the use of SuDS and aims to protect the quality of water.
43. *Policy 36 (Water Infrastructure)* advocates a hierarchy of drainage options for the disposal of foul water. Applications involving the use of non-mains methods of drainage will not be permitted in areas where public sewerage exists. New sewage and wastewater infrastructure will be approved unless the adverse impacts outweigh the benefits of the infrastructure. Proposals seeking to mitigate flooding in appropriate locations will be permitted though flood defence infrastructure will only be permitted where it is demonstrated as being the most sustainable response to the flood threat.
44. *Policy 39 (Landscape)* states that proposals for new development will only be permitted where they would not cause unacceptable harm to the character, quality or distinctiveness of the landscape, or to important features or views. Proposals are expected to incorporate appropriate mitigation measures where adverse impacts occur. Development affecting Areas of Higher Landscape Value will only be permitted where it conserves and enhances the special qualities, unless the benefits of the development clearly outweigh its impacts.
45. *Policy 40 (Trees, Woodlands and Hedges)* states that proposals for new development will not be permitted that would result in the loss of, or damage to, trees, hedges or woodland of high landscape, amenity or biodiversity value unless the benefits of the scheme clearly outweigh the harm. Proposals for new development will be expected to retain existing trees and hedges or provide suitable replacement planting. The loss or deterioration of ancient woodland will require wholly exceptional reasons and appropriate compensation.

46. *Policy 41 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)* states that proposal for new development will not be permitted if significant harm to biodiversity or geodiversity resulting from the development cannot be avoided, or appropriately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for.
47. *Policy 43 (Protected Species and Nationally and Locally Protected Sites)* development proposals that would adversely impact upon nationally protected sites will only be permitted where the benefits clearly outweigh the impacts whilst adverse impacts upon locally designated sites will only be permitted where the benefits outweigh the adverse impacts. Appropriate mitigation or, as a last resort, compensation must be provided where adverse impacts are expected. In relation to protected species and their habitats, all development likely to have an adverse impact on the species' abilities to survive and maintain their distribution will not be permitted unless appropriate mitigation is provided or the proposal meets licensing criteria in relation to European protected species.
48. *Policy 44 (Historic Environment)* seeks to ensure that developments should contribute positively to the built and historic environment and seek opportunities to enhance and, where appropriate, better reveal the significance and understanding of heritage assets. The policy advises on when harm or total loss of the significance of heritage assets can be accepted and the circumstances/levels of public benefit which must apply in those instances.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp>

Neighbourhood Plan:

49. The application site is not located within an area where there is a Neighbourhood Plan to which regard is to be had.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

Statutory Consultee Responses:

50. *Belmont Parish Council* – No response received.
51. *Highways Authority* – Raise no objections as the proposed development would not adversely affect road safety.
52. *Lead Local Flood Authority* – Indicate their satisfaction with the proposed Drainage Strategy and hydraulic calculations.

Non-Statutory Responses:

53. *Spatial Policy* – Advise that the proposal is likely to be inappropriate in the Green Belt as it will reduce openness so the key issue is whether there are very special circumstances to justify the development in light of the new and improved facilities which will be developed.
54. *Design and Conservation* – Consider the proposed scale, design, and material palette of the development to be appropriate in the context of the wider site.

55. *Landscape Section* – Advise that impacts on landscape character and visual effects would be minimal given the enclosed position of the site within the existing golf course complex.
56. *Arboricultural Officer* – Confirm their satisfaction with the findings and recommendations of the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment and recommend a condition to secure adherence to it during the construction phase.
57. *Ecology* – Raise no objections, advising that the submission has demonstrated that biodiversity net gains of at least 10% can be achieved.
58. *Environmental Health Nuisance* – Consider that the proposed development will not lead to an adverse impact or statutory nuisance.
59. *Environmental Health Air Quality* – Advise that an air quality assessment can be scoped out at Stage 1 of the IAQM guidance as no car parking spaces or centralised energy facility are proposed. Advise that an assessment of dust is required as there are residential properties within 250m of the site.
60. *Environmental Health Contamination* – Confirm there is no requirement for a contaminated land condition.
61. *Archaeology* – Raise no objections.

External Consultee Responses:

62. *Visit County Durham* – Confirm they are supportive of the application, advising that golf is an important part of the region's visitor economy mix and a crucial part of the business model of one of the County's most successful hotels and would improve its viability.
63. *Northumbrian Water* – Recommend a condition to secure further details regarding the management of foul and surface water from the development.

Public Responses:

64. The application has been advertised by way of a site notice, press notice and individual notification letters sent to neighbouring properties. No letters of representation have been received.

Applicants Statement:

65. The proposal is for golf clubhouse and driving range extension and alterations, located directly adjacent to the existing clubhouse within the existing golf driving range to the southwest of the main hotel.
66. The success of The Hotel as one of the premier accommodation destinations in County Durham is best demonstrated through the continued incremental growth of both the residential and leisure offering for both residents and day visitors. Developments within the last 10 years include increases to the number of Hotel bedrooms, the creation of the award winning two storey spa facilities, the re-development of the ballroom facilities and more recently the development

of 10no. high class woodland lodges. However, the golf clubhouse and its associated facilities have remained largely un-changed since its construction.

67. The proposed extension and alteration aims to significantly improve the existing leisure offer at Ramside Hall Hotel by developing a two-storey driving range with state of the art ball tracing technology, a six lane bowling alley, professional golf academy, function room, improved kitchen facilities and other minor internal alterations and improvements. The proposed development has been carefully considered over an extended period to ensure it is a sensitive extension to the existing building and facilities, within the existing driving range area.
68. Ramside Estates recently installed ball tracing technology into the range; which has resulted in increased use; so much so that they have had to introduce a queuing system. During busy and peak times, which are daily, there are often between 30-40 people waiting as the range is full. The proposed expansion would therefore enable the facility to cater for this increased demand.
69. Golf coaching and teaching has been an area in which Ramside Estates believe they have under-performed over the years due primarily to a lack of space and quality of their facilities. As part of this proposed development, the creation of a high-level golf academy, to be overseen by a well-known international golfer is seen as a method to develop golf, and the coaching / teaching of golf, in County Durham. It is Ramside Estates intention to produce a premium golf coaching academy hub with up to 6 professional coaches, providing high level coaching, specialist advice, specialist club fitting with hi-tech golf simulators along with school holiday golf education camp stays.
70. The improved kitchen and function room within the golf clubhouse development are seen as an integral and essential part of the development. The increased size of the driving range and the development of the bowling alley is expected to increase the numbers of patrons. In conjunction with this the function room will therefore be able to cater for events including birthday parties and conferences included with golf or bowling or both and golf day presentations, etc. This is seen as an essential part of the development as currently whenever there is a golf day presentation Ramside Estates must close the members bar, due to a lack of space. There are 120 golf days planned this calendar year so that is a significant time when members cannot access the clubhouse facilities. The proposed function room will enable the members bar and club house facilities to remain open throughout the year.
71. The addition of a bowling facility it is hoped will add further appeal in terms of conference business acquisition, by providing additional leisure / team building activities outside of the conference. Thus, increasing conference business and increasing overnight stays in the Hotel and County Durham. Furthermore, the proposed bowling facility will also have an obvious appeal to families visiting County Durham, which will further increase the appeal of overnight stays at the Hotel and County Durham.

PLANNING CONSIDERATION AND ASSESSMENT

72. Having regard to the requirements of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the relevant Development Plan policies, relevant guidance and all other material planning considerations, including representations received, it is considered that the main planning issues relate to the Principle of Development, Impact upon the Green Belt, Design, Landscape and Visual Impact, Impact upon Heritage Assets, Highway Safety, Flood Risk, Ecology, Residential Amenity, Carbon Emissions, and Other Matters.

Principle of Development

73. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material planning consideration. The County Durham Plan (CDP) is the statutory development plan and the starting point for determining applications as set out in the Planning Act and reinforced at NPPF Paragraph 12. The CDP was adopted in October 2020 and provides the policy framework for the County up until 2035 and is therefore considered up to date.
74. NPPF Paragraph 11c requires applications for development proposals that accord with an up to date development plan to be approved without delay. NPPF Paragraph 12 states that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local Planning Authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.
75. The application site occupies a position outside of any settlement and so lies within the open countryside. CDP Policy 10 seeks to direct development to built up areas in the first instance but is permissible towards development in the countryside where allowed for by one or more listed exceptions, or specific policies in the Plan. In this regard, footnote 56 lists Policies 7 and 8 relating to visitor attractions and accommodation as two such relevant policies.

Visitor Attractions and Accommodation

76. The application proposes to extend the existing golf clubhouse to increase the number of driving range bays and enhance the golf offer, which is a visitor attraction forming part of the wider hotel complex. No additional bed spaces for the hotel are proposed, however the improvement of existing leisure facilities at the resort complex will likely improve its desirability as a destination for leisure breaks and overnight stays.
77. CDP Policy 7 relating to visitor attraction acknowledges the importance of the visitor sector as part of the County's economy and states that in order to raise the quality of the visitor experience, the provision of new or expanded visitor attractions will be permitted provided they meet criteria a) to d). Development relating to visitor attractions in the countryside should also meet the requirements of criteria e) to h).

78. Criterion a) requires the visitor attraction to be located in a sustainable and accessible location, or a location that can be made so. In this regard, there are bus stops along the A690 that are frequently served by the Prince Bishops no.20 which connects Durham City to Sunderland throughout the day, with the Park and Ride located a short distance away to the west. In addition, Ramside Hall is an established hotel and leisure destination, with the golf course and driving range currently existing, located an approximate ten minute drive from Durham City centre. Therefore, the proposed development is not considered to conflict with criterion a).
79. Criterion c) requires the proposal to demonstrate how it would help support the viability of an existing attraction. Criterion d) requires the proposal to enhance and complement existing visitor attractions or priorities in the County and support the development of a year-round visitor economy and/or extends visitor stays.
80. The applicant has explained that ball tracing technology has recently been installed to the driving range which provides instant shot replays and statistical feedback on interactive game screens in each bay, allowing players to make swing adjustments and immediately see the impact on their golf shot. The technology also features games and modes suited for all ages and skill levels including a long-drive and closest to the pin competitions, advanced analytics, and the virtual playing of courses around the world. The applicant has explained that the technology has proved to be highly popular and has resulted in an increased demand leading to frequent queues of up to 40 people during peak times.
81. The development of a six-lane bowling alley would further diversify the leisure offer on site, helping to attract new and repeat visitors to the site. In particular, the applicant has explained that it is anticipated that this would improve the hotel conference market on offer at the site which would help to attract businesses from within and outside the County by providing conference guests with an additional team building leisure activity to enjoy.
82. The enlarged kitchen, office suite, and new function room within the golf clubhouse are in response to the increased size of the driving range and the introduction of the bowling alley which are expected to increase the numbers of patrons. The applicant has explained that conferences and golf presentations etc. are currently held in the private members lounge resulting in it being unavailable for use by its members. They have explained that there are 120 golf days planned this calendar year which is a significant amount of time that members would not be able to access the clubhouse facilities. The introduction of the function room and enlarged office suite would enable the members lounge to remain open throughout the year whilst providing a larger, modern single space for conferences.
83. In summary, it is recognised that there is a relationship between the various facilities that the hotel provides, with many visits to the site depending on the relationship between two or more of the facilities. It is considered that the improvements to the clubhouse and driving range will enhance the desirability of the venue for those wishing to play golf. This is in response to current demand to encourage repeat visits as well as cater for prospective new visitors. The introduction of the bowling alley would help to diversify the leisure offer

available at the site to encourage people visiting the site primarily in connection with other facilities to stay longer as well as to encourage prospective new guests to visit. The introduction of a new larger, modern office suite is aimed to attract business conferences who may also seek to stay overnight at the hotel and/or explore the enhanced leisure off proposed as part of team building activities. The introduction of the function room would help to retain and attract new golf club members by allowing the private member facilities to remain open all year round. The availability of each of the different elements at one site is considered to be attractive to prospective visitors, encouraging longer stays both during the day and overnight, as well as repeat visits, to occur throughout the year.

84. Overall, the proposals are considered to improve the desirability of the site as a venue for those wishing to play golf and as a destination for leisure breaks, helping to attract additional day and overnight visitors. Therefore, the proposal is considered to accord with criteria c) and d).
85. Criterion e) requires the proposed visitor attraction to meet identified visitor needs. In addition to the above, Visit County Durham have offered their support to the application, commenting that golf is an important part of the region's visitor economy mix and a crucial part of the business model of one of the County's most successful hotels which would improve its viability. Therefore, the proposal complies with criterion e).
86. Criterion f) requires the proposed visitor attraction to support local employment and community services. In this regard, the applicant has explained that an additional 12 full time equivalent members of staff are anticipated to be required in association with the development. The operation of the development would also help to support the associated supply chain which would help to support existing businesses. Therefore, the proposal complies with criterion f).
87. Criterion g) requires the visitor attraction to be supported by adequate infrastructure. In this regard, Ramside Hall is an established visitor attraction with the relevant infrastructure, including utilities connections and access and car parking, already in place. Therefore, there is no conflict with criterion g).
88. Criteria c), d), and f) of CDP Policy 8 are similarly permissible towards the development of visitor accommodation where it is necessary to meet identified visitor needs or would help to support future business viability and demonstrates clear opportunities to make its location more sustainable. There is no conflict with any of these criteria.
89. Criteria b) and h) of CDP Policy 7 and the General Principles for all development in the countryside set out at criteria l) to t) of Policy 10 will be discussed further where applicable under the relevant headings below.

Main Town Centre Use

90. In addition, a bowling alley and office suite are defined as a main town centre uses by Annex 2 of the NPPF and so CDP Policy 9 is considered to be relevant which states that proposals for town centre uses, as defined by the NPPF, not located within a defined centre will be required to provide a sequential assessment. NPPF Paragraph 91 advises that Local Planning Authorities

should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.

91. In this instance, the introduction of a six lane bowling alley represents the introduction of a new leisure offer that is compatible with and supplementary to the wider use of the site as an established leisure and tourist accommodation destination. Whilst the bowling alley would be available for use independently from the other leisure offers present at the site, it is also intended to be used alongside the existing leisure offer to increase the length of visitor stays as well as to attract the business conference market. Similarly, there is an intrinsic link between the creation of additional office space in the form of a comprehensive suite to cater for the business conference market.
92. Therefore, given the countryside location of the Ramside site and the link between the increased office floorspace, the introduction of the bowling alley, and the wider offer available at this established hotel and leisure complex, in accordance with CDP Policy 9 and NPPF Paragraph 91 it is considered that there are no alternative suitable sites located within, or on the edge of, a town centre that could accommodate these main town centre uses in this instance. Therefore, it is considered that the sequential test is passed.
93. In addition, CDP Policy 9 states that proposals for leisure development in excess of 2500m² proposed outside of a defined centre and that could impact on Small Town or Local Centres, will be required to provide an impact assessment in accordance with the guidance within the NPPF and the PPG. This is echoed by NPPF Paragraph 94.
94. In this instance, the bowling alley represents approximately 220m² of the floorspace of the extended building which is well below the 2500m² threshold. Therefore, an impact assessment is not required.
95. Overall, the proposed development would not adversely affect the vitality or viability of any nearby town centre and would help to attract visitors to the County and to nearby Durham City.

Impact upon the Green Belt

96. The application site is located within Durham City Green Belt. CDP Policy 20 states that development proposals within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national planning policy. The supporting text confirms that there is a presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.
97. The NPPF attaches great importance to Green Belts, and identifies, at Paragraph 143 that the Green Belt serves five purposes. NPPF Paragraph 152 under proposals affecting the Green Belt states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and 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.

98. NPPF Paragraph 154 advises that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
- a. buildings for agriculture and forestry;
 - b. the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport or recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; provided the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
 - c. the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
 - d. the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
 - e. limited infilling in villages;
 - f. limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
 - g. limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
 - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
 - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.
99. The starting point for consideration of this matter is that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be considered as inappropriate development. However, it is necessary to consider whether any of the exceptions set out above and in Paragraph 154 of the NPPF are applicable to the proposed development.
100. The application seeks planning permission primarily for the extension of the existing golf clubhouse in order to increase the number of driving range bays. The extension would also provide a bowling alley, accommodate locker rooms relocated from the existing clubhouse to provide a function room in the current building to allow the hosting of golf presentations and other events, and replace the smaller office rooms spread throughout the existing building with a larger modern, office suite for use by conference guests visiting the site and using the leisure offer. As such, the proposal is considered to relate to exception b) for the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of the land) for outdoor sport and recreation. However, to fall under exception b), the

facilities must preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with any of the five purposes of including land within it.

101. NPPF Paragraph 143 sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt:
 - a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
102. In terms of unrestricted sprawl, the scale of the proposed development is not significant in the context of the wider Ramside site. The clubhouse is located within the wider site and screened by woodland to three sides so would not be visible from the A690. Whilst located towards the edge of the developed area of the wider site, the clubhouse still occupies a relatively central location away from the site perimeters. Glimpses of the clubhouse can be seen through roadside vegetation from a short section of Pittington Lane to the south east, but the development would be seen in the context of the existing Spa buildings which are greater in height and located closer to this road. Overall, the proposed development would not result in unrestricted sprawl.
103. In terms of preventing towns merging, the clubhouse is sited in a relatively central position within the wider site, with part of the golf course separating it from the dwellings located to the edge of Carrville. Therefore, the proposed development would not result in the merging of settlements.
104. With regards to encroachment into the countryside, the proposed development would see the clubhouse extended approximately 15.5m to the north onto grassed land currently used in association with the driving range. However, the wider countryside beyond the estate would not be affected, with the boundaries of the wider estate being well defined by the A690, Pittington Lane and the disused Leamside railway line. Overall, the development is not considered to represent an encroachment into the wider countryside.
105. In terms of preserving the setting of historic towns, the proposed development would have almost no impact, being wholly contained within the hotel estate and with minimal wider visual impacts.
106. With regards to undermining urban regeneration, it is considered that the proposed development would not prejudice urban regeneration, being a site-specific form of development proposed to enhance the overall leisure offer of the established Ramside Hall site.
107. However, the impact of the development on the openness of the Green Belt also needs to be considered. The development must preserve openness in order to qualify for exception b); i.e., it must not have a greater impact than the existing clubhouse.

108. Planning Practice Guidance advises that openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects, so the visual impact of the proposal and its volume may be relevant. In this instance, whilst the visual impact of the extended clubhouse would be limited given its position within the wider site, glimpses of the clubhouse are possible through the roadside vegetation along a short section of Pittington Lane and the proposal would see the creation of approximately 2,200m² of floorspace, an approximate 60% increase. Therefore, although the visual impact of the development from outside of the established Ramside Hall site would be limited, its visual impact from within the site would be greater, albeit in the context of existing developments. However, given its considerable scale in terms of footprint and eaves height relative to the existing clubhouse building, the proposed development would inevitably have a greater spatial impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and so would not preserve its openness. Consequently, the proposed development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
109. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful, so it should therefore be considered whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and the further harm, caused to the openness of the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by the countervailing benefits arising from the development, so as to amount to very special circumstances. In considering whether to allow development in the Green Belt, the harm arising from the inappropriate development (and any other identified harm) must first be considered, and then secondly the benefits said to be delivered by the development; before then considering whether those benefits clearly outweigh the harm so as to amount to very special circumstances.
110. Very special circumstances can be made up of a single element, or a number of individual benefits, which when considered cumulatively can be considered sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm. The weight given to the various elements identified which either individually or cumulatively are considered to constitute very special circumstances is a matter of planning judgment and must be weighed against the Green Belt harm of inappropriateness and any other harm that may exist.
111. The application identifies the following which the LPA is invited to conclude amount to very special circumstances sufficient to permit the development:
- Continued Investment in Ramside Hall Hotel
 - Improving the Hotel and Tourism Offer in County Durham
112. The very special circumstances test is considered and applied later in this report.

Design

113. CDP Policy 29 outlines that development proposals should contribute positively to an area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape and landscape features, helping to create and reinforce locally distinctive and sustainable communities.

114. In addition, criterion b) of CDP Policy 7 is permissible towards the expansion of visitor attractions in the countryside where it would be appropriate to the site's location in terms of scale, design, layout and materials. Similarly, CDP Policy 8 is permissible towards proposals relating to visitor accommodation where it is appropriate to the scale and character of the area.
115. NPPF Paragraph 135 also advises that planning decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area over its lifetime; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).
116. NPPF Paragraph 139 advises that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.
117. The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a part single, part two storey flat roofed extension to an existing golf clubhouse. The clubhouse comprises a single storey building finished in red brick and a slate pitched roof. The proposed development would see the clubhouse extended to the north and the east, comprising mainly two storeys with a flat roof siting at an eaves height above that of the existing clubhouse (but below its ridgeline) finished in profiled sheeting. A red Raeburn brick is proposed to be used up to damp proof course level with cladding above and an aluminium glazing system.
118. Whilst of a larger scale in terms of its footprint and eaves height, than the existing clubhouse, the height of the extension does not exceed the ridgeline of the original building. When considered in the context of the development that has occurred within the wider site, including the larger spa and hotel bedroom extension completed in 2015 which is approximately 4.5m taller, the scale of the proposed development is not opposed.
119. Rather than seeking to replicate the existing clubhouse building on a larger scale, the flat roof and material palette give the extension a more contemporary appearance whilst keeping its bulk and massing to a minimum and identifying itself as a modern addition capable and befitting of the new facilities it would accommodate. The Design and Conservation Officer has reviewed the application and indicated their satisfaction with the proposals.
120. Overall, the design approach is considered to be appropriate in this instance, subject to a condition to secure precise details of materials prior to the commencement of development above damp proof course. With this condition, the proposed development is considered to be a positive addition to the site that is appropriate in terms of scale, design, layout and materials relative to the context in which it is located. Therefore, the proposed development accords with CDP Policy 7 b), 8, and 29, and Part 12 of the NPPF.

Landscape and Visual Impact

121. The site lies within the Green Belt, in an area identified in the County Durham Plan as an Area of Higher Landscape Value (AHLV), and within an area

included in the County Durham Local List of Historic Parks, Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

122. In addition, criterion h) of CDP Policy 7 is permissible towards the expansion of visitor attractions in the countryside requires such development to respect the character of the countryside.
123. CDP Policy 10 at part l) is permissible towards development in the countryside provided it would give rise to unacceptable harm to the intrinsic character, beauty or tranquillity of the countryside either individually or cumulatively, which cannot be adequately mitigated or compensated for.
124. CDP Policy 39 states proposals for new development will be permitted where they would not cause unacceptable harm to the character, quality or distinctiveness of the landscape, or to important features or views. Proposals would be expected to incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects. Development affecting Areas of Higher Landscape Value will only be permitted where it conserves the special qualities of the landscape unless the benefits of development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.
125. CDP Policy 40 seeks to avoid the loss of existing trees and hedgerows unless suitable replacement planting is provided.
126. Parts 12 and 15 of the NPPF promotes good design and sets out that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by (amongst other things) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
127. The site lies in the Wear County Character Area which forms part of the larger Tyne & Wear Lowlands National Character Area and the Eastern Valley Terraces Broad Character Area which belongs to the Lowland Valley Terraces Broad Landscape Type. The site is made up of Golf Course which falls under the Parkland Local Landscape Type. The site lies within an area identified in the County Durham Landscape Strategy (2008) as a Landscape Conservation Priority Area with a strategy of conserve and enhance.
128. The Landscape Officer has advised that the visual effects and the effects of the proposed development on landscape character will be minimal, as the visual envelope will be limited predominantly to within the golf course complex with the exception of some glimpses through the roadside vegetation along a short section of Pitlington Lane.
129. The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment which identifies that eight trees need to be removed to accommodate the proposed extension and the external terrace which provides a fire escape route. In addition, one oak tree will also need to be removed to accommodate the installation of the new perimeter net to the driving range. Minor pruning is also required to be undertaken to a further two trees. Given the size, quality, and position of the trees in an area not frequented by members of the public, and that the majority of the trees would be retained, this tree loss is not considered to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area.

130. The posts for the new perimeter netting to the driving range will encroach into the root protection areas (RPA) of several trees but the works would only involve small localised excavations which are not considered to adversely affect tree roots. Hard landscaping works would encroach into the RPA's of two trees and should be carried out in accordance with the submitted Arboricultural Method Statement. This includes the installation of protective fencing and a permeable membrane for the duration of the construction works.
131. An area measuring 32m² is identified for the planting of Rowan and Wild Cherry trees to deliver biodiversity net gains and to mitigate for the tree loss arising as a result of the proposed development. This will be secured via the biodiversity net gain condition.
132. The submitted information has been reviewed by the Council's Arboricultural Officer who has indicated their satisfaction with the findings and recommendations. A condition is recommended to secure adherence to the submitted information.
133. Overall, views of the proposed development would predominantly be limited to vantage points from within the Ramside complex and in this context it would not adversely affect the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape, according with CDP Policies 7 h), 10 l), 39 and 40, as well as Parts 12 and 15 of the NPPF.

Impact upon Heritage Assets

134. Ramside Hall itself is a Grade II listed building situated in extensive grounds, which themselves are listed as a Historic Park and Garden of Local Interest. Since the 1960s the Hall has been subject to a series of developments in piecemeal fashion which has compromised its legibility and character but it still retains a moderate level of heritage significance. Whilst the development would impact upon the setting of the hall by virtue of its physical and visual presence, the magnitude of impact is considered to be negligible, and therefore there would be no harm to heritage assets. The numerous additions and extensions to the Hall means that there would be only limited visual interaction between the proposed extension to the clubhouse and the historic core of the hall. Furthermore, the hall was historically designed to be mainly appreciated when approaching from the north west, and such views would remain unaffected by this development.
135. CDP Policy 44 sets out development will be expected to sustain the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting. Development proposals should contribute positively to the built and historic environment and should seek opportunities to enhance and, where appropriate, better reveal the significance and understanding of heritage assets whilst improving access where appropriate. The policy permits flexibility in decision-making where harm is found to the heritage assets, with a public benefit test referenced similar to that within the NPPF.
136. The lengthy list of modifications and extensions to the main hall have diminished the heritage assets legibility and character to such a degree that its level of heritage significance as it stands today is moderate, lessen the impact

against this heritage asset. The location of the proposed lodges away from this main fabric to a degree lessen further their impacts upon the heritage asset. Design and Conservation Officers have advised that they have no objections to the proposed development.

137. In terms of the Historic Park and Garden, it is noted that the proposal would not result in the loss of any features forming an integral part of the special character or interest of the park and garden, and given its location, specific nature, and previous erosion of the historic park and garden, that any impacts would be negligible in this context.
138. Having regards to the above, no harm to listed buildings would occur as a result of the development in accordance with CDP Policy 44. Having regard to the statutory duty imposed on the Local Planning Authority under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that, when considering whether to grant planning permission for a development which affects a listed building or its setting, the decision maker shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, it is considered that these will be preserved. NPPF Paragraph 202 states that any less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, however as there has been no harm identified in this instance, it is not necessary to carry out this test on this occasion. The proposal is considered to be in accordance with Part 16 of the NPPF with respect to heritage impacts.

Highway Safety

139. CDP Policy 21 outlines that development should not be prejudicial to highway safety or have a severe cumulative impact on network capacity, expecting developments to deliver well designed pedestrian routes and sufficient cycle and car parking provision. Similarly, CDP Policy 29 advocates that convenient access is made for all users of the development together with connections to existing cycle and pedestrian routes. CDP Policy 10 at criterion q) does not permit development where it would be prejudicial to highway safety.
140. The NPPF sets out at Paragraph 114 that safe and suitable access should be achieved for all users. In addition, NPPF Paragraph 115 states that development should only be refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts on development are severe.
141. Access is proposed to be taken from the existing site access from the A690. The site is accessible by bus and benefits from approximately 640 car parking spaces which is considered to be sufficient to cater for the increase in visitors to the site arising from the extended clubhouse and additional facilities on offer, whilst acknowledging that visitors to the site often frequent more than one of the leisure offers available. The Local Highways Authority have been consulted and have raised no objections to the application.
142. Overall, it is considered that the proposed development will not adversely affect highway safety, according with CDP Policies 10 q) and 21, as well as Part 9 of the NPPF.

Flood Risk

143. Part 14 of the NPPF seeks to resist inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Paragraph 173 advises that when determining planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere and that where appropriate applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment. Paragraph 169 goes on to advise that major developments should incorporate sustainable drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate.
144. CDP Policies 35 and 36 relate to flood water management and infrastructure. Policy 35 requires development proposals to consider the effects of the scheme on flood risk and ensure that it incorporates a Sustainable Drainage System (SUDs) to manage surface water drainage. Development should not have an adverse impact on water quality. Policy 36 seeks to ensure that suitable arrangements are made for the disposal of foul water.
145. In addition, criterion s) of CDP Policy 10 requires new development in the countryside to minimise vulnerability and provide resilience to impacts arising from climate change, including but not limited to, flooding.
146. The site is not located within a Flood Zone or an area identified as being at high risk of surface water flooding.
147. The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment, Drainage Strategy drawing, and hydraulic calculations. The Drainage Strategy identifies that surface water runoff is to be discharged to an existing basin to the west of the site which is to be extended. The drawing indicates that the basin slopes will achieve the recommended 1:5 gradient. The Lead Local Flood Authority have reviewed the submitted information and indicated their satisfaction with it. However, a condition is recommended to secure details of a final scheme to manage surface water, to include construction details for the extended SUDs basin.
148. Foul water is proposed to be discharged to an existing private sewer. As recommended by Northumbrian Water, it is considered appropriate details of a final scheme to manage the disposal of foul water via a suitably worded condition.
149. Overall, subject to a condition, the principle of the proposals is considered to accord with CDP Policies 35 and 36 and Part 14 of the NPPF.

Ecology

150. NPPF Paragraph 180 d) advises that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

151. NPPF Paragraph 186 d) advises that opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.
152. In line with this, CDP Policy 41 seeks to secure net gains for biodiversity and coherent ecological networks. Policy 43 relates to protected species and nationally and locally protected sites. Part 15 of the NPPF seeks to ensure that developments protect and mitigate harm to biodiversity interests, and where possible, improve them.
153. The application site lies approximately 840m to the north of The Scrambles Local Wildlife Site (LWS), 1.3km north west of Coalford Beck Marsh LWS, and 1.8km west of Pittington Hill SSSI and 2.2km west of High Moorsley SSSI. Frankland and Kepier Woods LWS lies 1.3km to the west of the site beyond the A690.
154. The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan and the completed Biodiversity Net Gain Metric.
155. The PEA identifies that the golf clubhouse is a modern building and well maintained with no potential bat roost or hibernation sites. None of the trees to be removed have any potential to support a bat roost or hibernation site. There is no suitable habitat for ground nesting birds within either of the grassland areas given the management regimes and the level of human disturbance. The site and additional area provide very limited habitat for small mammals, hedgehogs, and invertebrates. The site is too far away from any suitable river or burn to be suitable as otter or water vole habitat.
156. The PEA concludes that the proposed development would have a negligible impact on bats, badgers, breeding birds, otters and water voles, small mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and invertebrates, and so no further surveys are necessary. The installation of an integrated bat box to the extended clubhouse is recommended in the interests of increasing biodiversity.
157. The PEA also identifies that surveys undertaken in May 2017 found evidence of the presence of great crested newts in man-made ponds to the south of the clubhouse, outside the application site but within 100m of the development area. Great Crested Newts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. A mitigation licence from Natural England must be applied for if the works would have impacts on great crested newts that would otherwise be illegal, such as: capturing, killing, disturbing or injuring them (on purpose or by not taking enough care); damaging or destroying their breeding or resting places (even accidentally); or obstructing access to their resting or sheltering places (on purpose or by not taking enough care). CDP Policy 43 seeks to conserve protected species and their habitats and protect them from development which would have a likely adverse impact on their ability to survive, reproduce and maintain or expand their current distribution.
158. The PEA identifies that the rough grassland on the edge of the driving range could provide potential amphibian refuge habitat, but that the mown grass areas forming the driving range are unsuitable. The proposed development would only see the loss of habitat in the form of mown grassland which is considered

unsuitable habitat for newts and there are no features where newts could be present but out of sight. Therefore, the proposed development would not lead to an offence under the protected species legislation from the loss of habitat or from obstructing access to a refuge habitat.

159. The PEA goes on to recommend that a 'newt fence' be erected around the building site as a precautionary measure to ensure no accidental harm to any great crested newts present outside of the application site prior to any foundations being dug. This mitigation is considered to be an appropriate precautionary measure to allow a viable population of any newts present outside of the application site to be maintained, in accordance with Policy 43. Given the above it is not considered that a newt license would be required in this instance. The PEA has been reviewed by the Council's Ecologist who has indicated their satisfaction with the submitted information. Accordingly, a condition is recommended to secure adherence to the recommendations of the PEA.
160. As the application was submitted after the 12th of February 2024, the requirements of the Environment Act 2021, as inserted into Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, apply to this planning application and necessitate that the proposed development achieve biodiversity net gains of at least 10%. The proposed development would result in the loss of approximately 1,345m² of grassed land which is currently in use as a driving range and is in poor condition. The Biodiversity Net Gain Plan identifies a 32m² area of land to be planted with trees, as well as a 1,000m² area of land to be planted with enhanced grassland of a moderate condition. Both areas are located outside of the application site but within the wider Ramside site under the ownership of the applicant, located beyond the perimeter netting marking the edge of the driving range. The submission identifies that the proposals would be capable of achieving biodiversity net gains of 66.34%, significantly in excess of the required 10%.
161. Subject to the standard biodiversity condition to secure details of a final Biodiversity Gain Plan, to include management and monitoring details, the application accords with CDP Policies 41 and 43, Part 15 of the NPPF, and the requirements of the Environment Act 2021.

Residential Amenity

162. Parts 12 and 15 of the NPPF require that a good standard of amenity for existing and future users be ensured, whilst seeking to prevent both new and existing development from contributing to, or being put at unacceptable risk from, unacceptable levels of pollution.
163. CDP Policy 31 states that all new development that has the potential to lead to, or be affected by, unacceptable levels of air quality, inappropriate odours and vibration or other sources of pollution, either individually or cumulatively, will not be permitted including where any identified mitigation cannot reduce the impact on the environment, amenity of people or human health to an acceptable level.
164. In addition, criterion r) of Policy 10 is not permissible towards development that would impact adversely upon residential or general amenity.

165. The closest residential dwellings to the site are located approximately 150m to the south at Ramside Park and 190m to the west at Romney Drive. Given these distances, the proposed development would not adversely affect the amenity of any neighbouring residents in terms of visual dominance, or loss of light or privacy.
166. Whilst the extension would provide a dedicated function room, functions and events including golf presentations and birthday parties already take place within the private members bar. Environmental Health have not identified any existing complaints regarding noise and no representations from residents have been received. Whilst the capacity of the clubhouse would be increased this is not considered to be to a level that would adversely affect the living conditions of the closest residents to the site given their distance away and intervening tree belt. In addition, Environmental Health have raised no objections to the application. However, it is considered appropriate to restrict the timings of events and functions held within the clubhouse to between 11am to 12am, and the hours of operation of the driving range to between 7am to 11pm.
167. Seven 8m high LED floodlights are proposed to be installed to the rear of the driving range bays. The application is supported by specification details of the floodlights as well as a plan to show the extent of light spill. The floodlights would feature adjustable heads which would be positioned to shine out onto the driving range, restricting light spill in the direction of the closest residential properties to the south and west, which are located beyond a belt of trees. Environmental Health have reviewed the submitted information and advised that this demonstrates that the lighting will be within reasonable parameters. Therefore, the proposals are not considered to adversely affect amenity in terms of light pollution. A condition is recommended to restrict the hours of lighting to the operational hours of the driving range.
168. Environmental Health Officers have also advised that an assessment of dust is required as there are residential properties within 250m of the site, although they consider the risk to be low. The application is supported by a Construction Management Plan which identifies that the site is separated from the residential properties to the south and west by an intervening tree belt which is to be retained, and dust suppression measures to be utilised including the dampening of waste soil before being tipped and enforcing a 10mph speed limit for construction vehicles. These measures are to be reviewed on a daily basis by the site manager. The risk of dust is considered to be most prevalent during the earth works which the applicant has explained is expected to last approximately six weeks. The details within this document are considered to be sufficient to safeguard the amenity of nearby residents during the construction phase of the development.
169. Overall, subject to conditions, the proposals are considered to provide a good standard of amenity for existing and future residents, according with CDP Policy 31 and Part 12 and 15 of the NPPF.

Carbon Emissions

170. Criterion c) of Policy 29 requires all development to minimise greenhouse gas emissions, by seeking to achieve zero carbon buildings and providing renewable and low carbon energy generation. Where connection to the gas

network is not viable, development should utilise renewable and low carbon technologies as the main heating source.

171. Criterion d) of Policy 29 requires all development to minimise the use of non-renewable and unsustainable resources, including energy, water and materials, during both construction and use by encouraging waste reduction and appropriate reuse and recycling of materials, including appropriate storage space and segregation facilities for recyclable and non-recyclable waste and prioritising the use of local materials.
172. NPPF Paragraph 164 advises that in determining planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic.
173. The application is supported by a Sustainability Statement which identifies that solar panels are to be installed to the flat roof of the extension and a secure compound installed on site to enable the safe storage of materials and segregation of recyclable and non-recyclable waste during the construction phase. The development is to be built in accordance with the most up to date Building Regulation requirements in terms of insulation and air tightness, which would be an improvement of the thermal performance of the existing building, including that it will be improved by the replacement of the polycarbonate roof to the members bar with a fully insulated solid roof. These details are considered to be sufficient to comply with criteria c) and d) of CDP Policy 29.
174. In addition, CDP Policy 29 states that all major new non-residential development will be required to achieve Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) minimum rating of 'very good' (or any future national equivalent).
175. The application is not supported by any information to establish the potential BREEAM rating of the development. However, approximately 1,450m² of the proposed floorspace to be created would be in the form of the covered driving range bays which would be open to the elements and so would not be heated. The remaining approximate 750m² floorspace to be created would be enclosed and heated, but this on its own would fall under the threshold of a major development which triggers the need to achieve a 'very good' BREEAM rating. Therefore, it is considered that the proposed development is not required to achieve a 'very good' BREEAM rating in this instance.

Other Matters

176. CDP Policy 32 requires sites to be suitable for use taking into account contamination and unstable land issues. NPPF Paragraph 183 requires sites to be suitable for their proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from land instability and contamination.
177. The application site does not lie within a Coalfield Development Risk Area. The Council's Contaminated Land Officer has advised that following a review of the historical maps and the contaminated land screening assessment form submitted with the application, there is no requirement for further information

relating to contaminated land. Therefore, the proposed development is considered to comply with CDP Policy 32 and NPPF Paragraph 189.

178. CDP Policy 27 requires all new residential development to be served by a high speed broadband connection. This will need to be directly accessed from the nearest exchange and threaded through resistant tubing to enable easy access to the cable for future repair, replacement and upgrading. Where it can be demonstrated that this is not appropriate, practical or economically viable, developers will be encouraged to provide appropriate infrastructure to enable future installation.
179. The applicant has confirmed that the hotel and golf clubhouse is currently served by a fibre broadband connection.

Whether there are Very Special Circumstances to Outweigh Harm to the Green Belt

180. Ramside Hall Hotel is a successful hotel complex comprising the hotel, spa, 36 hole golf course, restaurants and a small number of woodland lodges and treehouses. The site has been steadily expanded over the last decade, to become one of the major providers of high quality visitor accommodation and leisure facilities within the immediate vicinity of Durham City.
181. As discussed earlier in this report at Paragraphs 74-77, ball tracing technology has recently been installed to the driving range which has seen a significant increase in demand. The technology provides instant shot replays and statistical feedback on interactive game screens in each bay, allowing players to make swing adjustments and immediately see the impact on their golf shot. It is understood that the only other golf facility in County Durham with similar technology is Brancepeth Castle Golf Club, although it features only three covered bays and does not provide any overnight accommodation. Therefore, in this regard the proposed development with provision of 40 covered golf driving bays fitted with this technology would offer a unique type of experience within the County that would be attractive to people wishing to play golf. This is alongside the other leisure and accommodation offers available at the site.
182. As part of the scheme, a high-level golf academy is also proposed to be created which would consist of a premium golf coaching academy hub with at least four professional coaches, overseen by a well-known international golfer. This would enable the provision of high level coaching, specialist advice, specialist club fitting with hi-tech golf simulators, along with school holiday golf education camp stays. The current golf coaching and teaching offer on site is restricted by a lack of space, consisting of a single room for golf swing analysis utilising video footage, and the quality of their facilities which are largely unchanged since their original construction. The proposed development would address this through the creation of a larger golf academy space and increasing the number of driving range bays from 15 to 40, responding to increased demand following the installation of ball tracing technology. Whilst just a snapshot in time, when visiting the site during a weekday afternoon all of the driving range bays were observed to be in use.
183. The proposed development represents continued investment in this key location. The development could only occur in the Green Belt, as it is required to be located within close proximity to the golf course as part of the overall golf

offer at the site and there is no suitable alternative location within the hotel's ownership. The proposed development would improve the desirability of the Ramside site as a venue for golf and a destination for leisure breaks, with the accommodation and ball tracing technology currently on offer proving to be successful and in demand. The proposed development would bring about benefits for people looking to play golf recreationally and those seeking to receive high level golf coaching. The enhanced facilities would help maintain the established position of Ramside in the high quality accommodation market in the north east, helping to attract more visitors and encourage them to stay longer at the site, bringing about associated benefits to the local economy through increased visitor spend. The proposals would also see the direct creation of 12 full time equivalent employment positions, and the support of businesses within the associated supply chain including from increased use of the lounge and bar.

184. In addition, it is recognised that there is a relationship between the various facilities that the hotel provides, with many visits to the site depending on the relationship between two or more of the facilities. The introduction of the six lane bowling alley is considered to represent a supplementary leisure offer of an appropriate scale that would diversify the existing leisure offer available at the site, helping to appeal to a wider audience and attract more visitors. In particular, this is considered to appeal to the business conference market by providing an alternative team building activity and encouraging longer stays, including a greater number of overnight stays, thereby increasing the likelihood of greater spending by visitors, with subsequent benefits of this for the local economy. In this regard, the applicant has explained that the number of conferences held at the site complex has reduced in recent years and the introduction of the bowling alley is intended to increase the appeal of the site through the offer of an additional team building activity available outside of the conference itself.
185. Alongside the increased leisure offer, the introduction of a modern, enlarged office suite would also be more attractive for use by conference guests. The provision of a dedicated space for conferences and functions would also free up the private members bar in the golf clubhouse, which has been booked for conferences and events for 120 days this year. By providing such a dedicated space, this would make joining the golf club more attractive for prospective members as well as helping to retain existing members.
186. In terms of improving the leisure and hotel offer in County Durham, it is noted that the Durham Tourism Management Plan identifies a number of priorities relevant to this proposal. These include lengthening the amount of time that visitors spend in the County, improving the quality of the visitor experience, differentiating Durham, attracting new staying visitors and developing new products and support existing product strengths, all of which the proposed development would contribute towards. This would be valuable to the tourism offer in Durham City and the County, as well as the wider economy. In this regard, the applicant has explained that following the construction of the spa, as an enhanced leisure offer, there has been an increase in overnight visitors to the site.
187. The proposed development would represent a further diversification to the leisure offer, making an important contribution to the existing high quality leisure

and tourism offer at a regionally important accommodation location within close proximity to Durham City. It is considered unlikely that such a combination of factors, all of which would reinforce the positive impact of the development upon the local tourism economy could be achieved at another location.

188. The scheme would have a spatial impact on the openness of the Green Belt due to its increased footprint and increased eaves height relative to the existing golf clubhouse. Given this, the level of Green Belt harm resulting from this proposed development in terms of impact on openness is assessed as being moderate, acknowledging the contained envelope of, and in the context of existing developments within, the application site within the wider site complex which would restrict its visual impact. Added to this harm is the harm arising by reason of inappropriateness which is of substantial weight.
189. In terms of the benefits of the scheme, these include:
- Continued investment in Ramside Hall Hotel, one of the major providers of high end accommodation and leisure facilities within the County;
 - Improvements to the leisure offer would help to attract more visitors and encourage them to stay longer at the site, bringing about associated benefits to the local economy through increased visitor spend. Specifically, this would be achieved through:
 - An enhanced golf offer through the provision of additional driving range bays fitted with ball tracing technology and a larger dedicated golf academy space which would help to attract visitors looking to play recreationally and receive high level coaching;
 - An enhanced business conference offer and diversified leisure offer through the creation of a modern office suite and the introduction of a bowling alley to provide a team building activity;
 - The direct creation of 12 full time equivalent employment positions, and the support of businesses within the associated supply chain.
190. These are considered to be of sufficient magnitude to clearly outweigh the harm.
191. Accordingly, very special circumstances exist and are considered to outweigh the resulting harm to the Green Belt in this instance. Therefore, it is considered that the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt contained within NPPF Paragraph 152 is engaged and accordingly the proposed development is in compliance with Part 9 of the NPPF and CDP Policy 20.

CONCLUSION

192. NPPF Paragraph 12 states that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.

193. The proposed development to accommodate an increased number of driving range bays would help to meet an increased demand following the installation of ball tracing technology, with the provision of a six lane bowling alley, modern office suite, and function room also helping to complement the existing leisure offer, extend visitor stays, and the viability of the business. In particular, the type and scale of the ball tracing technology in operation at the driving range bays is different to the offer at similar attractions in the County. Visit County Durham have offered their support for the proposals, which would also see the hiring of an additional 12 full time equivalent members of staff and help to support the associated supply chain. Overall, the scheme accords with CDP Policies 7 and 8 relating to visitor attractions and accommodation. The proposed development would not adversely affect the vitality or viability of any nearby town centre, and would help to attract visitors to the County and nearby Durham City.
194. The proposed development would be situated within Durham City Green Belt. Despite the proposed development not conflicting with the five purposes of the Green Belt and its limited visual impact from outside of the wider Ramside site, it would have a greater impact on openness than the existing clubhouse and so would constitute inappropriate development, which is by definition harmful, in addition to the harm to the openness of the greenbelt. However, in this instance it is considered that the continued investment in Ramside Hall Hotel, and improved tourism offer within County Durham, which could only be achieved through the development occurring on this site within the Green Belt, would clearly outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt. Accordingly, very special circumstances have been demonstrated in accordance with CDP Policy 20 and Part 13 of the NPPF.
195. The proposed development would not adversely affect on the character of the surrounding landscape or the significance of the Grade II listed Ramside Hall and is of a scale and design approach which is considered to be appropriate in the context of the surrounding site, according with CDP Policies 29, 39, and 44.
196. The proposed development would see the delivery of biodiversity net gains in excess of the mandatory 10%, would not increase flood risk on site or elsewhere, would not adversely affect the living conditions of nearby residents and would be powered by renewable energy in the form of solar panels.
197. Overall, it is concluded that the proposed development accords with CDP Policies 7, 8, 10, 20, 21, 29, 31, 32, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 43 and 44, as well as Parts 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 of the NPPF. Accordingly, with no material considerations to indicate otherwise, the application is recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

Public Sector Equality Duty

198. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities when exercising their functions to have due regard to the need to i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct, ii) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share that characteristic.

199. In this instance, officers have assessed all relevant factors and do not consider that there are any equality impacts identified.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

Site Location Plan 687-00A
Proposed site plan 05
Proposed Basement and Ground Floor Plans 687-02A
Proposed First Floor and Roof Plans 687-03A
Proposed Elevations 687-04A
Biodiversity Net Gain Plan 06 A
Tree location, constraints and protection plan TLP_TCP_TPP01
Drainage strategy DR-C-0101 P2
Proposed PV Panel Layout
Construction Management Plan
LED Floodlighting

Reason: To define the consent and ensure that a satisfactory form of development is obtained in accordance with Policies) 7, 8, 10, 20, 21, 29, 31, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 43 and 44 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 2, 4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. No development shall commence until a detailed scheme for the disposal of foul and surface water from the development hereby approved has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with Northumbrian Water and the Lead Local Flood Authority. Thereafter the development shall take place in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that surface and foul water are adequately disposed of, in accordance with Policies 35 and 36 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 14 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

4. Prior to the commencement of development above damp proof course, details of the make, colour and texture of all walling and roofing materials shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, the development shall be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the area and to comply with Policy 29 of the County Durham Plan and Part 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

5. No construction work shall take place, nor any site cabins, materials or machinery be brought on site until all trees and hedges, indicated on the Tree location, constraints and protection plan TLP_TCP_TPP01 as to be retained, are protected by the erection of fencing, placed as indicated on the plan and comprising a vertical and horizontal framework of scaffolding, well braced to resist impacts, and supporting temporary welded mesh fencing panels or similar approved in accordance with BS.5837:2010. The construction phase shall take place in accordance with the details within the Tree Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Arboricultural Method Statement dated the 13th of February 2024.

No operations whatsoever, no alterations of ground levels, and no storage of any materials are to take place inside the fences, and no work is to be done such as to affect any tree. No removal of limbs of trees or other tree work shall be carried out. No underground services trenches or service runs shall be laid out in root protection areas, as defined on the tree location, constraints and protection plan.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area and to comply with Policies 29 and 40 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

6. In undertaking the development that is hereby approved:

No external construction works, works of demolition, deliveries, external running of plant and equipment shall take place other than between the hours of 0730 to 1800 on Monday to Friday and 0730 to 1400 on Saturday.

No internal works audible outside the site boundary shall take place on the site other than between the hours of 0730 to 1800 on Monday to Friday and 0800 to 1700 on Saturday.

No construction works or works of demolition whatsoever, including deliveries, external running of plant and equipment, internal works whether audible or not outside the site boundary, shall take place on Sundays, Public or Bank Holidays.

For the purposes of this condition, construction works are defined as: The carrying out of any building, civil engineering or engineering construction work involving the use of plant and machinery including hand tools.

Reason: To protect the residential amenity of existing and future residents from the development in accordance with Policy 31 of the County Durham Plan and Part 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

7. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until the PV panels shown on the Proposed PV Panel Layout drawing have been installed and are operational.

Reason: To minimise carbon emissions through the use of renewable energy sources in accordance with Policy 29 of the County Durham Plan.

8. The development shall take place in accordance with the recommendations contained within Section 8 Mitigation of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken by Veronica Howard dated February 2024. This shall include the erection of a newt fence around the building site prior to the commencement of and for the duration of the construction phase, and the installation of an integrated bat box to the extended clubhouse prior to its first use.

Reason: As a precautionary measure to ensure no accidental harm to great crested newts prior to any foundations being dug and to provide roosting opportunities for bats, in the interest of conserving protected species and their habitats in accordance with Policy 41 and 43 of the County Durham Plan and Part 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

9. No events or functions shall place within the golf clubhouse outside the hours of 11am to 12am. The driving range shall not be available for use outside the hours of 7am to 11pm. The external floodlighting shall not be turned on outside the hours of 7am to 11pm.

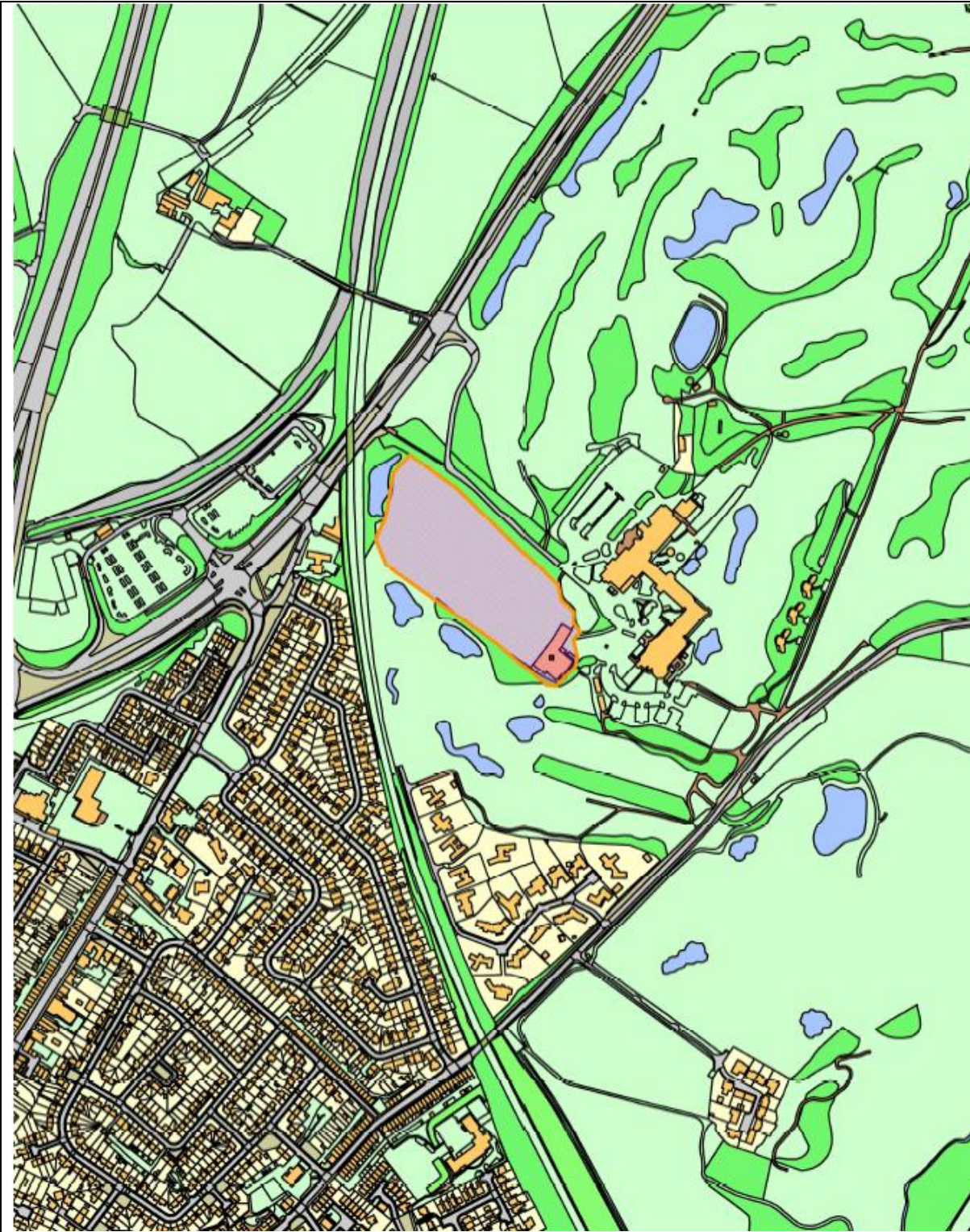
Reason: In the interests of the residential amenity of surrounding properties in accordance with Policy 31 of the County Durham Plan and Part 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

STATEMENT OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

In accordance with Article 35(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, the Local Planning Authority has, without prejudice to a fair and objective assessment of the proposals, issues raised and representations received, sought to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner with the objective of delivering high quality sustainable development to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area in accordance with the NPPF.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Submitted Application Forms, Plans and supporting documents
National Planning Policy Framework
The County Durham Plan (CDP)
Residential Amenity Standards Supplementary Planning Document 2023
The Council's Parking and Accessibility Supplementary Planning Document 2023
Statutory consultation responses
Internal consultation responses
External consultation responses



<p>Planning Services</p>	<p>Erection of part single and part two storey extension to Golf Clubhouse and Driving Range</p>	
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	<p>Date: 23rd May 2024</p>	