

Friday, 20 January 2012

Dear Mr Westerman,

App No 11/1970/P/FP

I wish to object to this application for the installation of four floodlit tennis courts on land belonging to the Wychwood Golf Club at Lyneham.

Light Pollution The site lies within the Cotswold AONB adjacent to the small village of Lyneham. Though there is the normal domestic and security lighting associated with the golf course and the houses in the village, the driving range is not lit and there is no street lighting in the village. This is an area which is still dark at night. CPRE has long been engaged in a campaign to preserve what remains of our dark areas and is currently drawing the attention of the public to the diminishing opportunities to observe the night sky because of light pollution. We are opposed to the introduction of any extensive new lighting into the rural environment.

It is clear from the applicant's Design and Access Statement and from the attached LVIA that every effort has been made to adopt a design and siting for the courts and lighting which will minimise their impact on the surrounding environment. The fact that previous applications for floodlit courts at Shipton under Wychwood have been refused by WODC points to both the determination of the club to do all possible to achieve their objective and the difficulties of accommodating such a development in a rural area. The applicant maintains that the current proposals meet all of the criteria set out in policy BE21 of the Local Plan. However, it is clear that the club envisages the facilities being used extensively at night- 5.35 of the Planning Statement implies that the lighting could be on every night until 21.30- and is likely to be at the very least an

irritant to local residents (BE21c). More seriously, even low spillage lighting will add pollution to a currently dark area, significantly altering its character and thus contravening BE21d.

Siting of the courts and level of use. As with the proposals for lighting it is clear that the applicant has made a great effort to minimise the visual impact of the courts on their immediate surroundings. Nonetheless the four hard courts, new pavilion, chain link fencing and 24 x 6.7m lamp supports do constitute a significant change in the landscape. Though it is true (Planning Statement 3.19) that this is “ an existing sports landscape”, hard tennis courts look very different from a golf course. The level of noise from the courts is also likely to be considerably more than from the golf course (Local Plan BE19).

It is also apparent that the club sees the building of these courts as part of a long term strategy for expansion. Their arguments for better facilities to serve their current membership, attract new members including young players and thus to contribute to healthier lifestyles are well made. Whether a site in the open countryside, accessible only by car, is the best choice for such facilities, is open to question. Policy TC1 of the Local Plan points to such applications only being allowed where they will meet local needs or where they are essential to the existing use of local land. Clearly the golf club is not dependent on the building of the tennis courts ; how “local”, local needs are is debatable, but it is difficult to argue that the needs of the inhabitants of Lyneham are uppermost in this application.

Possible alternatives In section 3 of their Design and Access Statement the applicants mention that they have in the past used courts at Chipping Norton which now fall below the necessary standards. It is not clear why it would not be possible to use the grant from the LTA to bring these courts up to standard. The impact of both lighting and noise would be less in an urban environment . While it might be objected that Chipping Norton is further away from the Wychwoods and Burford, it is only 5 miles from the site at Lyneham, the pool of potential members would be enlarged and more people might be able to access the facilities on foot, by cycle or by public transport.

Gillian Salway Chairman West Oxon CPRE