

## Planning committee sub-committee meeting re Cherkley Court, 11/11/11

This group (CB, CA, FB, HP) met in the Help Shop on Friday afternoon to study the application submitted by Mr. Vigors of Longshott, the current owners of Cherkley Court, to transform the building and grounds into a high class hotel, health club with pool, spa and golf course.

Some of the new building and alterations had already been agreed by MVDC when an earlier application to do the same things had been submitted in 1999. This was when the house was being viewed as a private residence. However, the current application is to change the use from residential to business and commercial. In addition, the main (and controversial) application now is for a golf course. This would take up both the Northern Parkland area and the Forty Acre field to the south. It is controversial because, as well as being the fourth golf course in the area, it would involve the alteration in character of much of the present very agricultural landscape.

The developers are at pains to point out that the minimum would be done to create this golf course and in this that they would be helped by the sheer size of the area so that instead of having compressed and cramped fairways which would entail mowing most of the site, these would be well spaced out and only require minimal mowing of the centre strip of the fairway. They also stress that the bunkers will not be left as raw, bright sand but will curl over so that the turf can hide the bare subsoil.

The architectural design of the new buildings and the alteration of the old one all seem to be in a pleasing matching style. The club house is meant to look like a converted barn and therefore vaguely agricultural. It is to be done in timber which we hesitated to applaud as timber does tend to look rather sad after a few years.

The current access road, with its bisecting effect on both the landscape and the proposed golf course, is to be altered, thereby improving the view, the course and reducing tarmac in a sensitive area.

It is unclear what the developers intend for the current residents of the Garden House and the other cottages. Presumably they will be given notice to quit if their homes are needed for more accommodation.

Overall, the plan did seem quite acceptable, but the main stumbling block is the Local Plan and the area's designation as being of "Great Landscape Value." in order to protect it from development as a golf course I now quote from "The

Surrey Hills AGLV review” conducted by Chris Burnett and Associates in June 2007” which includes extracts from the Local Plan: (my print in bold).

POLICY ENV6: AGLV: “Development within the Area of Great Landscape Value which would be **inconsistent** with the intention of protecting the Area’s distinctive landscape character will **not** be permitted. **Small** scale development for the reasonable needs of agriculture, forestry or **outdoor recreation**, as well as that in support of services for the local community, will normally be acceptable in the AGLV provided that such proposals **conserve the landscape character** and are in accordance with the policies of this plan.

In paragraph 12.72, it specifically says that golf course proposals will directed away from these areas of high landscape quality. The same document goes on to say that ancillary buildings should be small scale and not a large restaurant/bar catering for the non-golfer, nor squash courts, swimming pool or gymnasium. Admittedly, the planned club house does not contain quite all these facilities, but they are very close by and will contribute to the general heavy use of the area.

Such statements will need to be toned down or ignored if this plan is to go ahead.

However, all the above refers to either the present or what could be in a year or so. Suppose we were to look further ahead, about six or seven years when Longshot say they intend to sell the business. What guarantee can there be that the new owners will respect the restraints and duties imposed by the site? Suppose it is a sad failure .... MV would be left with some very damaged landscape and a number of buildings requiring yet more money to restore them to private residential use.

In conclusion, I would like to urge all our members to contact MV with their own particular view point. Nor are we (Leatherhead) alone facing this conundrum. The Dorking Preservation Society has also held a special meeting to discuss it and some of our members have been present. This will be an extremely difficult decision to make for our councillors and the more varied and numerous the opinions they receive the more likely something sensible can be worked out.