

WHITEHAVEN GOLF COURSE

Phased alterations to existing 18 hole golf course over a period of 15 years including alterations to ground levels through importation of inert materials and soils, the creation of additional planting areas, the replacement of existing planting areas and alterations to drainage

1. Introduction

Whitehaven golf course is owned and run by Western Lakes Ltd. The owners are a local company, and they bought the site from Copeland Borough Council in 2003; prior to that the course was tenanted and run by a PGA professional. The course occupies an area of around 77ha on the northern fringe of Whitehaven.

The course was developed in the early 1990's following on from an Opencast Coal mining operation (apart from 3 ha in the south west corner of the site; current holes 3 and 4). Reinstatement of the opencast site was agreed to be a golf course.

Handover of the course was proposed in 1995 although the Council did not accept the course as complete or playable. Following litigation, the Council took over the course in the late 1990's and the tenancy mentioned above was commenced.

In 2003 when Western Lakes purchased the site it comprised of a 18-hole course along with a temporary portacabin clubhouse.

Since then, the owners have.

- built a 12bay golf driving range with pro shop and teaching bay
- built two greenkeepers sheds to store and maintain the equipment for the course.
- Invested in updated equipment and machinery to maintain the course
- made improvements to the course in terms of planting, drainage, a new 2nd hole, upgraded the bunkers and several features around the course including toilets halfway round.
- Built a new clubhouse with a capacity for up to 300 guests in a social venue. The bar area offers meals to the public and there are facilities for meetings and corporate events.
- These improvements and investments have lead to many local people being employed on a full or part time basis to suit their role within the business.
- Consents have been granted on site for visitor accommodation (chalets) and for an Academy course although these have not been fully implemented yet. Investment to date is more than £5m.

Membership comprises over 350 full members, both male and female, with Junior and Over 50's branches.

2. Issues on site.

The site has some intrinsic issues in relation to its physical condition as opposed to its design and this has a critical influence on playability and thus economic viability.

Following opencast activity there was limited topsoil returned to site. Whilst top soil is adequate for purpose the underlying fill material is essentially clay, reflecting the local geology . This means that most if not all fairways are very badly drained with a very high clay content. This has led to the presence of impeded drainage on most fairways which means that in times of high rainfall and during the period October to March the course is unplayable due to ponding and plugging of balls.

To add to this much of the wooded areas on site which were planted following opencast operations were inserted via a “ridge and furrow” (sometimes known as rig and furrow) method meaning they are impenetrable by players trying to find balls and are unable to be accessed by machinery for maintenance purposes. These areas also suffer impeded drainage and in most areas such planting has not grown well, comprising stunted growth and a tangled understory.

The restrictions on play caused by drainage issues and impenetrable planted areas have affected membership and restricts serious play to summer months. Even that can be interrupted by periods of heavy rainfall.

Whilst some remedial works using imported material works have taken place on an ad hoc basis over the last 10 years to attempt to rectify these physical constraints under a disposal licence granted by the Environment Agency, a comprehensive course of remedial action is proposed to secure the future of the facility.

3. The proposal.

It is proposed to carry out a phased importation of clean subsoils and permeable material to improve the quality of the setting of the fairways, dealing with the drainage issues inherent at the present time. This will include introduction of swales where appropriate. Depth of new fill will vary but commonly be between .5 to 3 m.

Phasing will occur over a 15-year period giving an importation of around 225,000 cubic m. Annual importation will average out at about 14,000cm per annum.

At the same time, each phase will incorporate new and re-established woodland to increase course setting and eliminating the current problems in those latter areas. Provision will be made on site for storage and lay down of materials.

Permeable material will be sourced from the G&AM Lawson recycling facility at the Energy Coast Business Park at Haile which has a licenced throughput of 75,000 cubic m per annum. Importation from that facility would take up to 20% of the throughput from that source annually.

The specification for the material will be set by the independent landscape architect (Galpin Landscape based in Windermere) for the project and the product would be produced and monitored to that specification to ensure that the quality required was met.

(note there is a commonality of Directorships between Western Lakes Ltd and G&AM Lawson so this arrangement can be secured relatively easily.)

It would be intended to maintain an 18 hole offer throughout the works period. This can be done by taking a hole out of use for works and introducing an additional par 3 hole or splitting a par 5 into two par 3's or a par 3 and par 4. The driving range, pro-shop and clubhouse will remain open at all times 364 days per year.(Covid 19 permitting)

Clearly the scale of the works proposed are more than the current activities on site where localised issue of drainage have been sought to be remediated and planning permission will be required.

4. Application.

It has been agreed via consultation process between the applicant, the Brough Council and the County Council that this matter will be determined by Copeland and is not a waste disposal proposal.

It is intended that the application will be accompanied by additional studies including;

An FRA
Traffic Assessment
Habitat study
Landscape Impact Assessment
Overall masterplan

Any application will include details for the first 5 phases of work through to 2025 with subsequent phases submitted in detail via condition.

5. Access

The access to the course will remain unchanged. The point of access was subject to a planning consent under ref 4/16/2376/0F1 in May 2017 which included replacement of the existing layby and landscape works. This consent has been partially implemented by provision of the required splay on the north side of the access. It should be noted that the access point is a replacement for the original access as provided by the Opencast Executive. Thus this access and the detail of landscaping and a new layby are not included within this application as they already have consent .

MJN Associates Jan 2022