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Getting teed off by golf club's landfill designs

20 April 2024

A Surrey golf club has been accused of being a "landfill site in disguise" after anger at the sheer volume of heavy lorries that could be needed to drop waste off at the site.

The owners of Merrist Wood Golf Club, off Holly Lane, are hoping to redesign and reconstruct the existing course including water features and the creation of a heathland and wetland habitat.

The remodelling would include making use of nearly 600k tonnes of recovered 'inert materials' across the 55-hectare site. 'Inert waste' is discarded materials that do not biodegrade or chemically react with other substances.

These plans, which are currently under consideration, could see around 141 Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements at the sites for up to 256 days a year across the possible two years of the renovation project. A six-hour period is proposed for these movements meaning at peak times there could be one HGV movement every 2.5 minutes.

The planning application has received 55 objections and only one letter of support. Opposing the application, locals have raised concerns the HGVs would exacerbate an already congested road and increase wear and tear. One resident said: "Everything is just a constant worry. We moved here for peace and now it feels like it has been taken away."

Road safety issues were highlighted by some residents, suggesting footpaths will be "destroyed" and there will be "no safe place" for students and parents to cross the road for Merrist Wood College and Fairlands School. Locals expressed fears about how the HGV movement would impact on 'school run' times and rush hour, citing the narrow lanes as already dangerous.

Despite residents' anxieties about the development's impact on the road, Surrey County Council (SCC) officers have concluded that "there are no unacceptable highway and transport impacts".

The applicant argues the many road journeys over the construction period will be less disruptive than traffic caused by piece-meal course maintenance. As the source of the inert soils is still unknown, it is likely routes from both the north and the south will be used to access the site.

Comments asked what 'inert materials' will consist of, with some dubious of where the matter will be sourced. Sceptical commentators have described it as a "landfill scheme in disguise" with the amount of material suggesting it is being "dumped on the site".

Rather than 'borrowing' existing soil on the course, inert waste is described as the 'best way' to create new terrain. Planning documents state if inert waste material was not used in the project, 'virgin' soil would have to be used.

Constructed in 1996, the applicant argues the 18-hole golf course has 'deteriorated' and "suffers from a number of underlying design defects". Taking over the course in 2020, Lavershots Oaks Ltd complained the club has a "poor reputation' and is 'failing' as a sports club and as a business.

The Guildford MP Angela Richardson has written to residents affected by the Merrist Wood Golf Club planning application to alert them to the proposals and the consultation. She raised concerns about the traffic disturbance, congestion caused and whether detritus will be left on the ground.

The Wooldridge Group (formerly known as Lavershot Oaks), which specialises in civil and contract build projects, filed for administration on February 5 this year. The Wooldridge Group has been approached for comment.

Consultation on the application ends April 16.

Image: Entrance to Merrist Wood Golf Club. (Credit: Google Street View)

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