Planning Policy Team,
South Northamptonshire Council
The Forum
Moat Lane
Towcester
NN12 6AD

Dear Sir/Madam

Local Plan Representations to the Regulation 19 Submission Draft South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2) Whittlebury Park Golf & Country Club, Whittlebury, Northamptonshire, NN12 8WP

On behalf of our client, Whittlebury Park Hotel, Spa, Golf & Country Club, we welcome the inclusion of Policy EMP5: Leisure and Tourism at Whittlebury Hall in the South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan Draft Submission (Regulation 19 Consultation). We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Officer responsible for the drafting of the policy and the consideration of minor amendments to the policy to discuss some of the suggestions set out below.

This letter sets out our response to the invitation by South Northamptonshire District Council for comments on the Draft Submission Plan. Public consultation on both the Proposed Submission Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal runs for a period of six weeks from Thursday 4 October to noon (GMT) on Friday 16 November 2018.

The policy recognises Whittlebury Park Hotel, Spa, Golf & Country Club’s contribution to the local economy as a successful business and employment location for South Northamptonshire District Council.

Whittlebury Park Hotel, Spa, Golf & Country Club is a successful business and employment location and is an important component of the employment offer of South Northamptonshire District Council.

The site has been developed over the last twenty-eight years to become the District’s principal golfing, activity, conference, wedding and banqueting venue. It is located within a short distance of a number of other visitor attractions within the District and also provides facilities for events held at the Silverstone Motor Racing Circuit.

The Estate stands in extensive parkland located to the south of the village of Whittlebury on the land formerly known as West Park which was previously one of the town parklands associated with Whittlebury Lodge prior to its demolition in the 1970s to construct a housing estate. It is now the District’s premier leisure facility comprising a number of principal parts:

- Four 9-hole courses of championship standard golf allowing maximum use of the golf courses at peak periods, a golf driving range and practice areas;
- Wedding events including ceremonies and banqueting;
- Multi activity days based on a range of countryside pursuits (including corporate hospitality);
• Bedroom accommodation, function rooms and conference and training facilities and a luxury spa in the four-star Whittlebury Hall;
• Budge accommodation in connection with the above; and
• Sites for camping and caravanning which are used for events taking place at the Silverstone Circuit.

The above summary of on-site facilities illustrates that the Estate is inclusive to all budgets and accommodation requirements of visitors.

The golf clubhouse known as The Atrium stands close to the start and finish of the four 9-hole golf courses and provides a two-storey golf driving range on the rear (south-western) elevation together with an all-weather putting course and indoor golf centre and a state-of-the-art golf club fitting centre. A new golf shop, two golf teaching bays, 15 holiday apartments and a members’ and residents’ lounge are currently under construction in extensions to The Atrium. Whilst the local golf club membership is very active, the courses are also used by visiting golfers and golf societies.

The Pavilion operates as the base for multi-activity days which are run on the land to the north-west of Whittlebury Park and includes 4 x 4 driving, fly fishing, archery and other sports. The 60-acre site enables a range of diverse country pursuits to take place. Wedding ceremonies, receptions and functions are held at The Pavilion, the adjacent Orangery and The Atrium, which includes a banqueting suite on the first floor.

To the north-west of the road leading in to the site is The Paddock Suite and the green keeper’s compound. The Paddock Suite is licensed to hold Civil Ceremonies and provides letting bedrooms in connection with events at the Estate. The building also contains toilet and shower facilities for camping in association with events at Silverstone on the land to the north-west.

Whittlebury Hall is a 4* hotel, originally approved as a Management Training Centre, but now includes a hotel with spa, etc., with a 450-space car park situated to the south.

Commentary on the draft policy and its preamble are set out below, additions are in red and deletions are in blue.

Paragraph 5.6.1

Whittlebury Park Hotel, Spa Golf & Country Club stands in a 600-acre parkland south of Whittlebury village. Whittlebury is situated south of Towcester, and to the east of Silverstone, and the north-east of the Silverstone Motor Racing Circuit. The site is accessed from the A413 (Towcester to Buckingham road) which runs through the village and from the road between Whittlebury and Silverstone and comprises a number of principal parts:

• Four 9-hole courses of championship standard golf allowing maximum use of the golf courses at peak periods, a golf driving range and practice areas;
• Wedding events including ceremonies and banqueting;
• Multi activity days and events based on a range of countryside pursuits (including corporate hospitality);
• Bedroom accommodation, function rooms and conference and training facilities and a luxury spa in the four-star Whittlebury Hall;
Paragraph 5.6.2

The site has been developed over the last twenty-eight years to become a principal golfing, activity, conference, wedding and banqueting venue. It is located within a short distance of other visitor attractions within the District and also provides facilities for events held at the Silverstone Motor Racing Circuit.

Paragraph 5.6.3

Planning permission has been granted for a golf shop, two golf teaching bays, 15 holiday apartments and a members’ and residents’ lounge. These are currently under construction in extensions to the existing Atrium clubhouse. The Estate needs a variety of accommodation to meet the evolving business needs. This includes additional four-star accommodation, budget, accommodation, holiday apartments, camping/caravan sites, high-quality accommodation and self-catering type holiday accommodation. The existing conferencing facilities require additional bedrooms to accommodate overnight stays. There is strong demand for self-catering holiday accommodation onsite as it reduces costs compared with bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation. Self-catering accommodation assists to facilitate multi-day stays on site as well as reducing commuting to and from the venue from the surrounding villages. Additional onsite accommodation will lead to greater spend in the District arising from visits to different local tourism attractions and buying goods and services in nearby villages and towns.

Paragraph 5.6.4

Note: This paragraph should be removed for the reasons set out below:

It should be noted that the improvement in local wild life and securing the future of the oak parkland are direct benefits that have resulted from the change of use from agricultural use to leisure use. There are a number of important environmental considerations that need to be taken into account when considering future development proposals. These include a local wildlife site with a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The site itself is within land categorised as a Potential Wildlife Site (i.e. unsurveyed). Several locations near the site have been identified as being of archaeological interest including possible undated settlements to the north east and immediate west and a possible Roman road route to the north east. The site lies within a defined Special Landscape Area. Note: Matters such as ecology, trees, and archaeology would be addressed through the development management process and would not be relevant to every application submitted for development on the Estate and it may be that other environmental considerations need to be made. It is therefore important that any new built development is concentrated around the existing built up area of the Estate. Built development elsewhere within the Estate will not be appropriate. Note: While it is likely that the majority of new development on the estate will be located within the built-up area of the estate the wording of the policy would restrict other development which may be required outside of the built-up area. Such development may include developments such as maintenance sheds, storage for green keeping equipment / maintenance equipment, built development associated with activity days, infrastructure/ facilities for the camping areas. This list is not exhaustive as it is not possible to predict what facilities may be required in the future.
Paragraph 5.6.5

The preferred approach to managing the visitor economy and for the development of this site is through the preparation of a Masterplan. This will set out the key principles for the future development of the site in terms of the type and distribution of development. The Masterplan will set out the key principles of development for the Estate, include detailed design and guidance to ensure that any development is sympathetic to its sensitive rural setting. Note: Detailed design will be addressed at the application stage for any new development and will generally be sympathetic to designs already used within the venue.

Note: Silverstone and Towcester no details.

EMP5: LEISURE AND TOURISM AT WHITTLEBURY HALL

1. An indicative Masterplan will need to be prepared and agreed with the District Council in respect of leisure and tourism development at Whittlebury Park and Hall. This could include development proposals for the following uses: NOTE: It is suggested that the Masterplan is indicative, this would allow for some flexibility to amend the Masterplan in response to any changes in the leisure market. It may be that in three years' time the demand for specific types of accommodation increases or decreases or a new type of market demand appears i.e. the market for golf holiday apartments has significantly increased

   a. Increased bed space for short stays;
   b. Enhanced and improved function space;
   c. Improved onsite camping and caravanning facilities;
   d. Further investment in longer stay self-catering holiday accommodation either through additional golf holiday apartments and/or log cabins

2. Any accommodation will be under Use Class C1 (NOTE: The use class of the accommodation would be controlled through the development management process. It is not unusual in the hotel industry to have some element of C3 accommodation which is ancillary to the business such as managers accommodation which is part of the overall employment package and allows the member of staff responsible for relevant licences to be on site out of hours).

3. The Masterplan will need to demonstrate that all proposals for new development:

   a. are of a nature and scale suitable for a rural location; and
   b. are sympathetic to the character and form of adjacent existing buildings and landscape setting and can be successfully integrated within existing landscape character and the character and form of the existing built development.

4. The Masterplan will need to consider the following design principles:

   a. layout, scale, and massing to respect the surrounding landscape features;
b. architectural styles, materials and colour palate to reduce visual impact be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the site Note: The site has developed over the past three decades and comprises buildings of varying styles and designs.

c. planting and landscaping to integrate the site into the surrounding landscape and reduce visual impacts and intrusions on the special landscape area (Note: This would be on the basis that any such planting and landscaping does not conflict with the design of the championship golf courses. Since 1990, the Oak trees in the park have been preserved with tree surgery, over 30,000 new trees have been planted and numerous wildlife flora and fauna habitats have been created that include a dozen lakes, all of which have enhanced the natural environment).

d. the creation, restoration and enhancement of wildlife corridors to preserve and enhance biodiversity that have been created over the past three decades.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Officer responsible for drafting the policy and minor amendments, if any further explanation of changes requested is required.

Yours faithfully

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DLP Planning Ltd