

ENGLISH HERITAGE

Golf in Historic Parks and Landscapes

REVISION NOTE

June 2012

On 27 March 2012, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The NPPF supersedes the majority of existing Government Planning Policy guidance.

Whilst some of the references in this document may now be out-of-date, English Heritage believes that it does still contain useful advice, guidance and case studies.

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

Golf in historic parks and landscapes



As the Government's adviser on the historic environment, English Heritage advises local planning authorities on development proposals affecting important historic parks and gardens, buildings, archaeological sites and conservation areas. This English Heritage position statement and guidance is intended as briefing for developers, property owners, local planning authorities, and conservation organisations on golf course proposals and related developments in designated historic parks and other historic landscapes in England.

INTRODUCTION

Golf is popular. Almost 1.5 million people play golf each month¹. The sport is suitable for a very broad range of ages and a lifelong interest. It offers enormous health and economic benefits. Over the last 120 years golf has played an increasing part in shaping the landscape of England with historic parks and landscapes often providing the setting for golf courses. At least 1 in 12 of the sites on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England now includes a golf course.

English Heritage's remit is to protect and conserve the historic environment. Whilst English Heritage considers each case on its merits and does not, as a matter of principle, object to the development of golf courses (recognising that such development can sometimes play a part in regeneration) there are cases where golf course development can irreversibly damage the historic environment. The introduction of golf courses within historic parks and landscapes almost invariably alters their historic physical form and can erode their character and damage archaeology.



The pattern and intensity of golf courses and related developments in parkland differs across the English regions and the constituent countryside character areas. Some of the oldest of these courses now form a valid part of a park's landscape history, but the majority have been developed since the 1980s. In the south east and east of England 116 historically important parks have been converted to golf courses. The sites on the English Heritage Register are finite and irreplaceable historic assets which, although covering a very small proportion of England's total land area, carry a disproportionate number of golf courses.

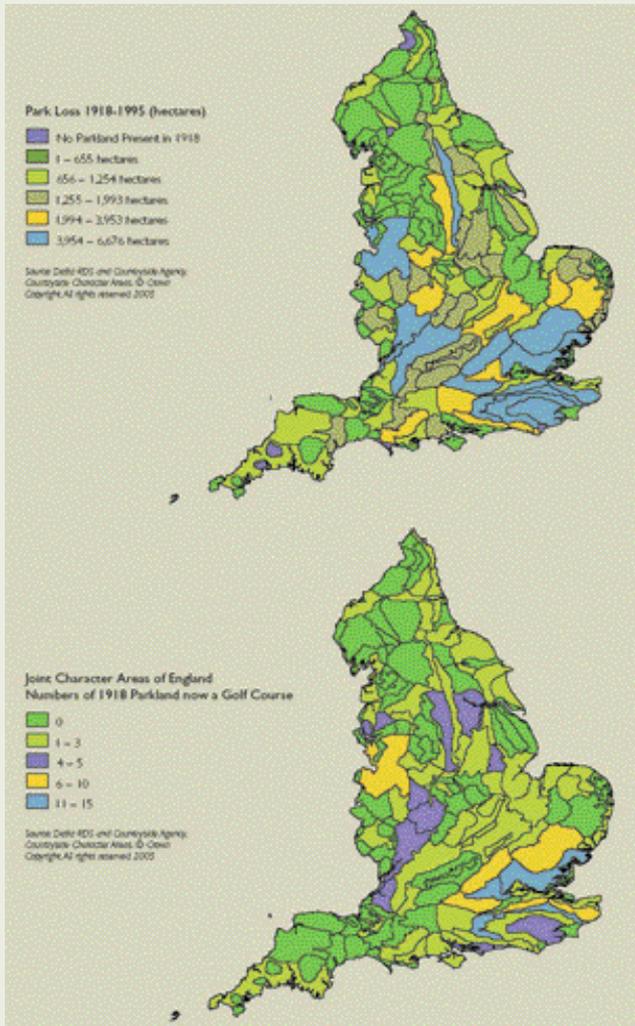
Golf course development can also have a damaging impact on scheduled monuments and their settings, other archaeological remains, the settings of listed buildings, conservation areas, and on the wider historic landscape.

Where English Heritage believes that golf courses and related developments are incompatible with the conservation of registered parks, gardens or other designated historic assets it will oppose such schemes and recommend that the determining local planning authority refuses the application.

Since the boom in golf course construction in England during the late 1980s and early 1990s the number of new courses being built has slowed to a handful a year. However the disproportionate number of courses within historic parks means that they have borne the burden of the extensions and modification of courses that have inevitably resulted from technological advances in equipment, changing markets and the need to improve course designs developed in the boom period.

Alterations to existing courses can provide an opportunity for positive change in the approach to managing golf in parkland. Proposals should be designed to conserve the fabric, character and significance of the historic environment, to repair any damage done by previous golf development, and to put in place

- 1 The Wernher Collection albums include mementoes of Lady Wernher playing golf with patients when Luton Hoo, a Grade II* registered park, was used as a convalescent hospital c1919. A luxury hotel with an 18-hole golf course is to be developed in this park which was laid out by Capability Brown in 1767. © The Wernher Collection
- 2 Maps of Defra/RDS and Countryside Agency Countryside Character Areas showing parkland loss 1918–95 and the impact of golf course conversion in parkland. *English Heritage 2005*



appropriate long-term management both in terms of the historic landscape and the enjoyment of the site. The England Golf Partnership also sees golf as offering 'an outdoor experience, at the same time capable of working in harmony with the environment'. Golf Environment Europe estimates that the land 'in play' is on average 48 per cent of golf course areas, and 'the relationship between golf and the environment depends upon the degree of attention to environmental detail shown during the courses planning, design, construction and management'².

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS

The historic environment is a precious and irreplaceable asset which deserves our most thoughtful care. This does not mean opposing any change but rather making informed and careful judgements based on an understanding of what matters about a landscape and why. English Heritage believes planning applications for golf course development in historic parks and landscapes should only be granted if all of the following criteria are met:

- Design and long-term management of the golf development fully recognises the significance, character and value of the site and its setting; and the proposal as a whole conserves the historic, aesthetic, cultural, archaeological, scenic and biodiversity interest of the site
- Proposals are founded on a thorough assessment of the historic and other significances and values of the development site and its wider setting, preferably in the form of a conservation management plan
- Conservation, management, and, if appropriate, repair of the historic environment is given proper consideration at an early stage and is incorporated as an integral part of the design of the golf course development and planning agreement
- Measures for monitoring and for reviewing short- and long-term conservation benefits are included
- Within health and safety considerations, proposals incorporate new and improved opportunities for public access; including interpretation of the historic environment and its significance, and other values such as biodiversity
- The proposals are sustainable in the widest sense, encompassing their cultural, environmental, social and economic impact and based on whole life costs and benefits. This criterion has three key aspects:
 - the need for an economically sound basis for the proposals that will support the long term conservation of the historic environment
 - a requirement for the responsible stewardship of natural resources
 - a responsibility to conserve and sustain the cultural, historic and aesthetic attributes of a site as a unique and finite resource for the benefit for future generations.

ENABLING DEVELOPMENT

Golf is often proposed as part of an enabling development package to rescue an important country house. Golf, though, is likely to have a significant impact on the park or landscape, an historic asset in its own right, the importance of which may potentially be as great as, or even greater than, the house. The significance of and potential impacts on the buildings, landscape, archaeology and their settings needs to be carefully considered and balanced. The historic park design can often be sustained at moderate cost, and its farming and forestry uses can even generate a modest income under traditional maintenance regimes. Historic parks are far less vulnerable to destruction from a lack of maintenance than buildings, at least in the short term. It is also possible, unlike a building, to recover a historic park which has not been maintained. It may therefore be preferable, in terms of historic environment and biodiversity interests, to leave such landscapes alone rather than accept golf course developments. More detailed information is given in English Heritage's policy statement and practical guide on enabling development and the conservation of heritage assets (see References).

DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

The design and management for golf courses in historic landscapes must flow from a thorough assessment of the site. There is no single solution or set of rules for approaching course design – all historic sites have their unique significance and character; and the essence of a good golf course design in this context is that it responds to the constraints and opportunities of the individual site.

A good design brief will acknowledge that golf course development in a historic landscape will be qualitatively and physically different from a conventional course. It will be based on the belief that parkland golf can be as distinct and enjoyable an experience as links golf or tournament course golf, with holes, greens and fairways (and other related developments). It will capitalise on the unique characteristics of the historic site as features of the course. The course design will respect and reflect the historic pattern of woodland, trees and open spaces rather than cut across or otherwise dominate them, and make the most of existing landforms rather than re-mould them.

- 3 Golf course designs often use water as a challenge, and water is needed to maintain the tees and greens. Water is often an important historic feature too. At Norwood Park, the golf course was built to United States Golf Association standards and the work included repairs to the 18th-century ornamental lake
- 4 There are many examples where the former principal house has been converted to the clubhouse. Historic parks and other landscapes are likely to include other historic buildings and structures such as gates, walls, parkland fences and features like this Martello tower on the Felixstowe golf course. *NMR_23915_06*
- 5 The view from Stapleford Hall, is still a grade II Capability Brown park with sheep grazing. This 1990s championship 18-hole golf course, in Leicestershire, has been designed as two extended loops around the main vista of the park, and care has been taken about details such as the fence lines to ensure these are not intrusive either.



- 6 A 36-hole and an 18-hole course are set in the Grade I registered Moor Park. The original course was designed by Harry Colt (1869–1951). Mature parkland trees have been retained in the current layouts and new planting has been added to define fairways. A new irrigation system was installed to serve both the private members' club course and the adjacent municipal course. The pump house and storage tank has been situated in woodland so it is screened from the listed mansion. © Nick White
- 7 The grassland characteristics of historic parkland and golf courses can be very different in colour and texture. Unimproved parkland grass swards are likely to be of wildlife value. At Ashridge in the Chilterns, the long parkland grass has been retained to add to the visual flow of the parkland, and a low fertiliser grass management regime helps blend in the fairways and greens.



The best management of a new course or extension to an existing one will seek to ensure that the conservation aims of the design are not eroded by ad hoc changes and additions. Ensuring this continuity depends on the translation of the conservation management plan into a detailed maintenance plan, and a long term commitment to the high level of care required to conserve the historic landscape.

Where a golf course in a historic designed landscape has been in existence for some time, good management will seek also to redress intrusive features and enhance the historic character of the landscape. The managers of any course in a historic designed landscape should seek expert advice on the historic character of the landscape and formulate appropriate management proposals accordingly.

GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

The best quality design and management of golf courses in historic parks and landscapes will:

- Be in keeping with the historic character of the site and its wider setting
- Use a conservation management plan and its historic environment research to inform works
- Arrange the course layout to avoid, or have the least impact on, the most significant areas and features of the historic landscape and any archaeological remains
- Be of a suitable density for the site – allowing sufficient space for the course to be laid out without crowding fairways together or impinging on significant features
- Protect and enhance important views and vistas
- Conserve and enhance structures, planting and other historic features
- Respect and conserve the historic pattern of approaches and routes
- Minimise earth moving and, where this does take place, base it on a thorough understanding of the significance of the existing landform and archaeological remains
- Exploit the existing topography and features of the historic landscape to add interest to play rather than replacing them
- Protect archaeological remains both above and below ground
- Minimise the introduction of bunkers, and if needed at all, design them to have as little impact as possible
- Minimise the introduction of new furniture, signage and paths and ensure any essential new elements are designed to complement the historic landscape in terms of their placing, materials, scale and style
- Ensure that adding new water bodies or modifying existing ones will not impact on the historic landscape, and opportunities are taken to restore lost water features

- Design and place new buildings so that they complement the historic landscape, existing buildings and their settings
- Re-use existing buildings of historic or architectural interest wherever appropriate
- Conserve, and where possible enhance, the biodiversity interest of the site
- Conserve existing (particularly veteran) trees and plant new trees to preserve or restore the historic tree planting patterns and species
- Design and maintain the grass of the golf course to reflect, where possible, the appearance of traditional maintenance regimes appropriate to the historic character of the site, keeping watering and the use of fertilisers to a minimum

Detailed Guidelines

Detailed guidelines on 10 key aspects of golf course design in the historic environment are provided at www.english-heritage.org.uk/parksandgardens and www.helm.org.uk, and they cover:

- Course layout and density
- Landform
- Buildings, car parks and circulation
- Trees and new planting
- Furniture, paths and lighting
- Bunkers
- Grassland management
- Water bodies and irrigation
- Landscape management and maintenance
- The wider historic landscape character.

- 8 Construction of tees and greens involves earth moving and such work may irreversibly reshape the historic park landform and damage its archaeology. At Ridding Park, the tees have been designed with a gentle land form.
- 9 Bunkers can look incongruous in parkland and their construction can damage the historic landform. At Ashdown Park Country Club, the 18-hole, Par 3 course design uses the natural landform and vegetation, rather than bunkers, to create challenges for golfers. The country club also offers jogging trails through the woods and other outdoor pursuits to help their guests enjoy the Sussex countryside.
- 10 Golf course furnishings and small-scale infrastructure can have a visual-impact far out of scale with the size of items like ball washers, seats, paths, signs, flags and lights. At Stapleford Hall, the practice ranges have been designed to have minimal impact. Golf is just one of many country pursuits offered at this country house hotel and sporting estate.



- 11 Sited on Cleeve Hill Common, an outstanding area of limestone grassland with considerable archaeological interest, this course is grazed by sheep which helps minimise the impact on the character of the common.
- 12 Design for new build should relate to its historic landscape. There are opportunities for quality contemporary architecture and high sustainability standards. At Hampton Court, the new club house has been designed to look like an estate building from a distance.
- 13 Edgbaston Golf Club, two miles south of Birmingham, is another course designed by Harry Colt (1869–1951) which uses its Capability Brown style parkland setting and includes veteran trees like this sweet chestnut. English Heritage’s guidelines on the web include advice on trees. The root zones of these historic and wildlife important trees need protecting; and ideally furniture like benches should be re-sited well away.



FULL PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The following list is an indication of the information likely to be required for significant golf developments (but it will vary from site to site).

- The planning application form (full planning application)
- A plan showing the site, its location, extent and context
- List description (listed buildings), register entry (registered park or garden or battlefield) and inscription (world heritage site)
- Map of designated conservation area, historic park or garden, battlefield, world heritage site, landscape and nature conservation designations and other local designations
- Scheduled monument number and/or map showing location
- Photographs, dated, numbered and cross referenced to a plan, showing the site and its context in general and the area of proposed change in detail
- Conservation management plan (or conservation statement) demonstrating an understanding of the historical, archaeological, scenic, ecological and other interest of the site and its significance
- Assessment or environmental statement, where required, of the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the asset and alternative options
- Statement of justification explaining why the works are desirable or necessary (including development appraisal where appropriate)
- Master plan showing the proposed development within the context of any longer term plans of the site owners
- Measured drawings and photomontages, models or computer visualisations as existing and as proposed, including details of materials, and showing the site as a whole rather than isolated features
- Plan showing the whole historic site and the whole golf course
- Plan showing the analysis of the wider historic landscape (for instance carriage drives and eye-catchers – even when outside the registered park boundary)

- Levels showing existing and proposed contours to detail appropriate to the historic significance of the parkland (likely to be at 0.5m intervals or less)
- Ground modelling for tees, greens and fairways and full details of all associated groundworks
- Orientation – changes in approach and circulation affecting perception of the landscape
- Significant views and vistas and proposed changes to them
- New buildings – size, form, use and access
- Changes to existing buildings
- Car parking and vehicular access including capacity and links with public roads
- Maintenance compounds, their siting and security measures
- Routes – vehicular, buggy paths, footpaths and their relation to existing routes
- Fencing and other boundaries
- Water features and water storage
- New planting – species, positions, sizes and methods of protection
- Existing trees and other planting, any proposed changes, and steps to be taken to protect trees during construction
- Grass design – identifying species, establishment methods and management regimes
- Proposed management of water – extent of irrigation; irrigation system; source of water; method of water storage; new water bodies; details of pumphouses; and changes to existing water bodies
- Lighting – including location, type, hours of operation and cable runs
- Golf course furnishings such as signs
- Landscape maintenance plan outlining the future maintenance of the site in line with the policies in the conservation plan/statement, for instance, identifying how the grass cutting/fertiliser regime will conserve the appearance of the historic parkland.

Plus any other material necessary to provide a full understanding of the impact of the works on the significance of the historic landscape and its setting.

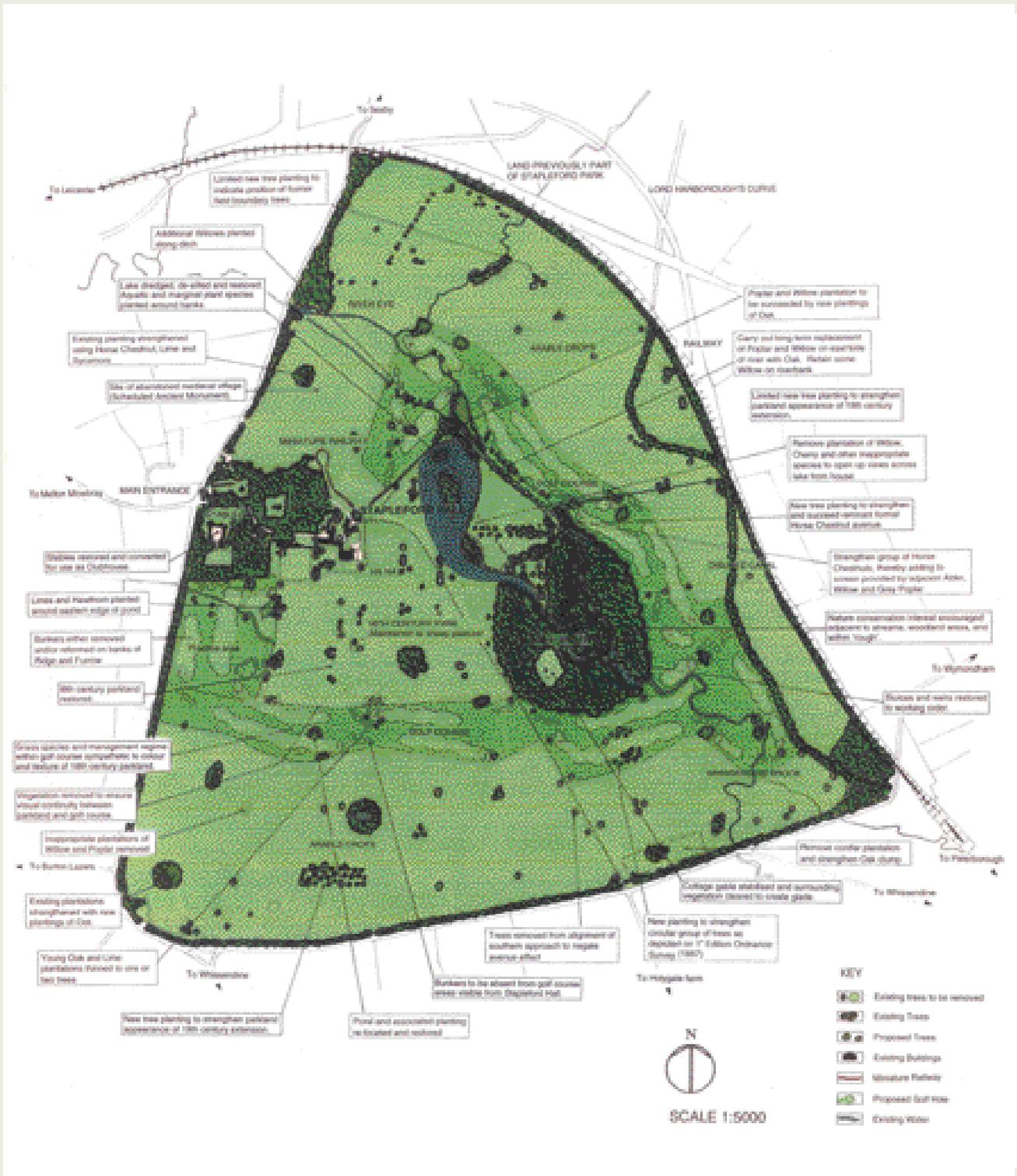
- 14 Hampton Court's extensive deer-grazed royal park includes an 18-hole golf course south of the Long Water. The course dates from 1895 but was later re-modelled by Willie Park (1864–1925).
- 15 Deer can be used successfully to graze both the golf course and parkland, helping to maintain the visual unity of the site as here at Wollaton.



Plans are recommended for all registered parks and gardens to inform and guide long-term conservation and management, and new development. Further smaller-scale development applications should be based on the site's conservation management plan, if one exists.

Advice on preparing plans for historic parks and gardens is available at www.english-heritage.org.uk/parksandgardens

16 The restoration masterplan for Stapleford Hall is summarised as a diagram for ease of use by staff and as a way of sharing the restoration plans with golfers and visitors. It shows proposals for new tree planting, felling of inappropriate planting, and planting to repair and enhance historic features. The plan also records sensitive areas to be protected from bunker development.



FURTHER GUIDANCE AND ADVICE

To accompany this leaflet, the websites www.english-heritage.org.uk/parksandgardens and www.helm.org.uk include further information on the history of golf courses in England, the key characteristics of parks of different historic periods, the impacts of golf course development on historic parks, and design guidelines

Golf Environment Europe is a non-profit organisation working to promote environmental sustainability in golf. Its website www.golfenviromenteurope.org includes a technical library.

The references below include the England Golf Partnership's vision and sport plan.

The Planning Portal (www.planningportal.gov.uk) is the UK government's online planning and building regulations resource for the public, professionals, local planning authorities and government. The website provides guidance on planning policy, planning and building regulations, planning permission and building regulation consent, and information about current planning appeals.

The Garden History Society's website (www.gardenhistorysociety.org) includes a Digest of Planning Inquiries affecting relevant sites in England and Wales. This is updated every 6 months and currently contains details of over 100 inquiries – most, if not all, of those to affect historic parks and gardens since 1996. The Society's website also includes a series of Planning Conservation Advice Notes.

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Golf course development and management

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English Heritage

English Heritage has a network of staff across England with a wide range of skills to advise on statutory consultations on planning applications. English Heritage may also be able to offer initial or pre-application advice. The English Heritage regional teams can be contacted at:

East of England Region

Brooklands House
24 Brooklands Avenue
Cambridge CB2 2BU
Tel: 01223 582700
Email: eastofengland@english-heritage.org.uk

East Midlands Region

44 Deangate
Northampton NN1 1UH
Tel: 01604 735400
Email: eastmidlands@english-heritage.org.uk

London Region

1 Waterhouse Square
138–142 Holborn
London EC1 2ST
Tel: 020 7973 3000
Email: london@english-heritage.org.uk

North East Region

Bessie Surtees House
41–44 Sandhill
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 3JF
Tel: 0191 261 1200
Email: northeast@english-heritage.org.uk

North West Region

Canada House
3 Chepstow Street
Manchester M1 5FW
Tel: 0161 242 1400
Email: northwest@english-heritage.org.uk

South East Region

Eastgate Court
195–205 High Street
Guildford GU1 3EH
Tel: 01483 252000
Email: southeast@english-heritage.org.uk

South West Region

29 Queen Square
Bristol BS1 4ND
Tel: 0117 975 0700
Email: southwest@english-heritage.org.uk

West Midlands Region

112 Colmore Row
Birmingham B3 3AG
Tel: 0121 625 6820
Email: westmidlands@english-heritage.org.uk

Yorkshire and the Humber Region

37 Tanner Row
York YO1 6WP
Tel: 01904 601901
Email: yorkshire@english-heritage.org.uk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Published by English Heritage, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ www.english-heritage.org.uk

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The guidance was developed for English Heritage by Land Use Consultants (Jane Wilson, Helen Kent and Adrian Wikeley), the Parks Agency (David Lambert), Mackenzie and Ebert Limited (Tom Mackenzie) and the project was managed by Virginia Hinze, Amanda Smith, and Jenifer White at English Heritage

Edited by Jenifer White and Joan Hodsdon

Images: English Heritage – Jenifer White (13); Land Use Consultants (3, 5, 7–12, 14–17)

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Brought to publication by Joan Hodsdon

With thanks to the owners, managers and officials of all the golf courses included in this document for their support, advice and hospitality and also to those who contributed to the consultations.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on all aspects of the historic environment.

Our role is to champion and care for the historic environment which we do by:

- Improving understanding of the past through research and study
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- Identifying and helping to protect buildings and archaeological sites of national importance
- Maintaining over 400 historic properties and making them accessible to the broadest possible public audience
- Maintaining the National Monuments Record as the central publicly accessible archive for the historic environment in England.

For more information please see www.english-heritage.org.uk

17 There are plans to improve the appearance of the golf course at Wollaton Park and its public access. Nottingham City Council, in consultation with the golf club and others, has developed a conservation plan to assess the significance of the site, determine appropriate conservation policies and guide development proposals.



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