



Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan - Regulation 18 Representation

Land at Lexden Wood / Spring Lane – Leisure-Led Special Policy Area

On behalf of our client, Lanswood Ltd, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the Colchester Preferred Options Local Plan at Regulation 18 stage.

Lanswood Ltd controls the Lexden Wood Golf Complex and associated land at Spring Lane. The site currently operates as a public and members' leisure facility comprising an 18-hole golf course, driving range, gym, café, treatment rooms and function space. While well-known locally, the facility has historically underperformed as a result of fragmented investment and legacy operational constraints.

We consider that the Preferred Options Local Plan presents a timely opportunity to recognise the site as a Special Policy Area for leisure-led development, enabling a comprehensive, coordinated and plan-led approach to investment and long-term viability.

Such an approach would allow the site to evolve from an underperforming private leisure facility into a vibrant, multi-functional green asset, contributing positively to Colchester's objectives for health and wellbeing, biodiversity enhancement, skills and education, and sustainable economic growth.

Planning Context and Opportunity

The site occupies a highly accessible location on the western edge of Colchester, adjacent to the A12 corridor and within the Colne Valley landscape. It is already established in leisure use and is surrounded by a mix of recreational, residential and green infrastructure assets.

Importantly, the site is not being promoted for comprehensive redevelopment, but for managed evolution through a leisure-led strategy that builds upon its existing role and character.

New ownership has already begun to invest in the golf course and ancillary infrastructure, including drainage and utilities upgrades, with demonstrable improvements to course quality and user experience. However, the long-term resilience of the facility requires a broader and more flexible planning framework to support complementary uses and diversified income streams.

Nature of Development Considered Appropriate in Principle

We consider that leisure-led development would be appropriate in principle within a defined policy framework. Subject to detailed assessment, masterplanning and mitigation, this could include:

- **Reconfiguration or relocation of the existing driving range**, enabling modern practice facilities and improved land efficiency;

- **Visitor accommodation**, such as lodges, chalets or a small hotel, to support golf breaks, events and short-stay leisure tourism;
- **Expansion of the gym and wellness offer**, potentially including a swimming pool and associated health facilities;
- **Provision of padel tennis courts and other recreational activities**, broadening participation and year-round use;
- **Flexible event and function spaces**, supporting weddings, conferences and community events;
- **Small-scale commercial floorspace**, through change of use or redevelopment of existing buildings, targeted specifically at SME-type businesses rather than large-scale employment uses;
- **Small-scale education facilities**, including training, academy-level sports provision or specialist educational uses, compatible with a green, campus-style environment.

Collectively, these uses would reinforce the site's leisure identity, improve financial viability, and secure ongoing investment in landscape, facilities and public-facing amenities.

Strategic Benefits

Allocation or designation of the site as a leisure-focused Special Policy Area would deliver a range of strategic benefits aligned with the Local Plan's objectives, including:

- **Health and wellbeing**: increased access to sport, fitness and outdoor recreation for a wider cross-section of the community;
- **Economic resilience**: diversification of income streams supporting long-term operation and reinvestment;
- **Tourism and visitor economy**: enhanced short-stay and destination leisure offer for Colchester;
- **Skills and education**: opportunities for training, academy-level sport and specialist educational provision;
- **Green infrastructure and biodiversity**: significant potential for Biodiversity Net Gain, habitat restoration and green corridor enhancements, particularly in connection with the Colne Valley and adjacent open spaces.

Suggested Policy Approach

We respectfully suggest that the Preferred Options Local Plan should identify the site as a Special Policy Area for Leisure-Led Development. To assist the Council, a draft policy wording is set out below.

Draft Local Plan Policy - Policy PPxx – Lexden Wood, Colchester

In addition to the infrastructure and mitigation requirements identified in Policy ST7 and subject to compliance with all other relevant policies, development will be supported on land within the area identified on the Policies Map where it provides for the enhancement and diversification of the existing leisure complex, including:

- a) Leisure-led development that builds upon and complements the established golf and recreational uses of the site, supporting its long-term operational and financial viability;
- b) The reconfiguration, extension, replacement or relocation of existing leisure facilities where required to facilitate improved or modernised provision;
- c) Visitor accommodation, health and fitness facilities (including potential indoor sports or swimming provision), outdoor sports and recreation uses, flexible event or function spaces, and small-scale education or training facilities, where these are demonstrably linked to the primary leisure function of the site;
- d) Limited small-scale commercial floorspace through change of use or redevelopment of existing buildings, targeted towards SME or leisure-supporting businesses and do not prejudice the leisure-led character of the site;
- e) A comprehensive, coordinated site-wide approach to development, supported by a masterplan proportionate to the scale and nature of proposals;
- f) Safe and suitable site access to appropriate highway design standards, with any changes to access arrangements to be agreed with the Highway Authority, and demonstration that proposals would not result in unacceptable impacts on highway capacity or safety;
- g) Green infrastructure and landscape-led design which conserves the character of the Colne Valley, strengthens habitat connectivity, and delivers measurable Biodiversity Net Gain;
- h) Measures to safeguard the amenity of nearby residential and recreational uses, including appropriate consideration of noise, lighting, traffic movements and visual impact;
- i) Sustainable drainage and water management measures, prioritising SuDS, with surface water managed on-site wherever possible and discharged in a manner that does not increase flood risk elsewhere; and
- j) Demonstration of adequate capacity for utilities and wastewater infrastructure, or the provision of appropriate mitigation or phasing arrangements to the satisfaction of the Council and relevant statutory undertakers.