

## Wyre Forest District Council Golf Facility Review

### Introduction

This report reviews current golf play provision within Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC). Golf was not included within the Playing Pitch Strategy as supplied by Knight, Kavanagh and Page (2017) because it is not a statutory sport. Although golf is not a statutory sport in which to include within a PPS as outlined by Sports England<sup>1</sup>, it was felt that a review would be beneficial in regards to the emerging Local Plan and specifically in regards to proposed site allocations within the former Burlish Golf Course.

This report will review the current golf courses within Wyre Forest District, and nearby courses in adjacent councils. It will also review current demand levels for Golf both in terms of local demand and also wider national trends. It will also discuss in detail the former golf course site at Burlish, and the proposed vision for the site.

### 1- Current Provision

Wyre Forest District currently has five English Golf affiliated courses currently operating, all of which are run as privately operated clubs. Each club does offer visitor pay and play service but are primarily membership clubs.

There is also an additional non affiliated private pitch and putt course based in Winterfold school, and a pay as you play pitch and putt course at Mini Pro Golf Parks. All of the Golf Clubs are within a 20 minute drive time for all Wyre Forest District residents, which is the drive-time catchment as recommended by Sport England.

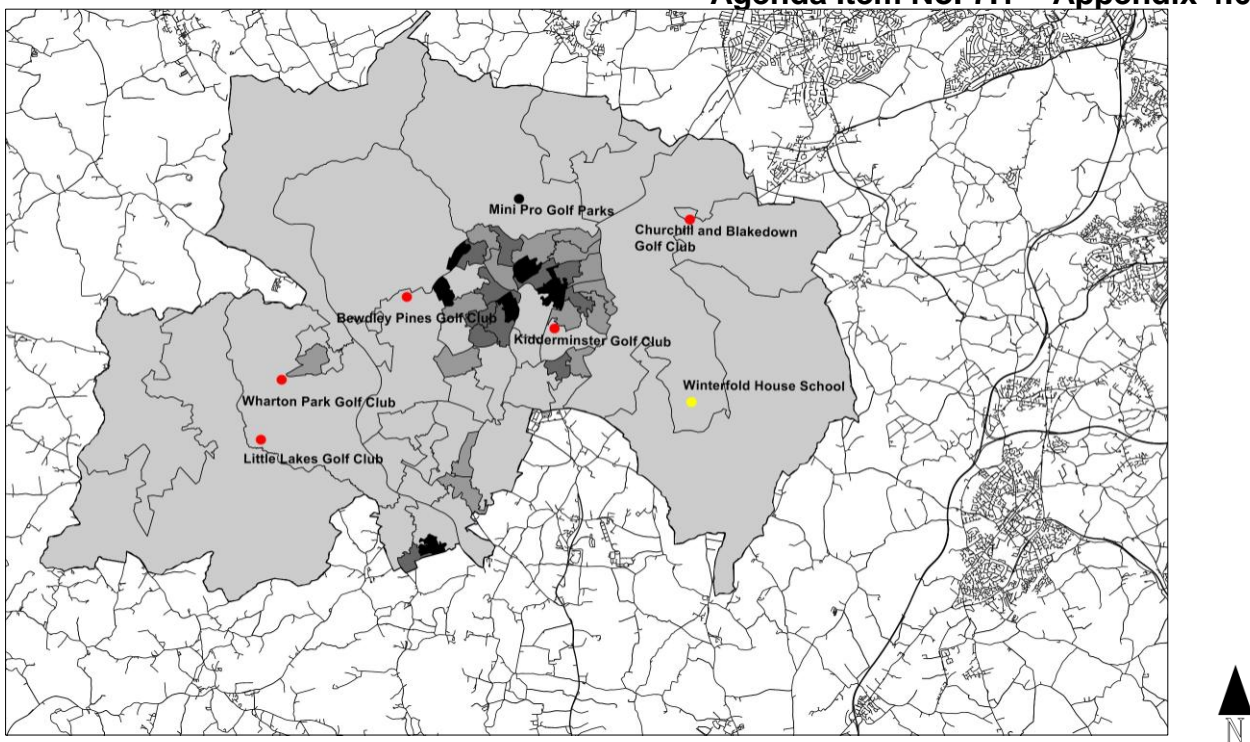
**Table 1- Summary of Wyre Forest Golf Clubs<sup>2</sup>**

Course	Location	Opened	Length (Yards)	Holes	Access Type
Bewdley Pines Golf Club	Habberley Road, Bewdley	1997	5302.6	18	Proprietary
Churchill and Blakedown Golf Club	Churchill Lane, Blakedown	1926	3199.5	9	Private Members Club
Kidderminster Golf Club	Russell Road, Kidderminster	1924	5865	18	Private Members Club
Little Lakes Golf Club	Lye Head, Bewdley	1975	5758.9	18	Proprietary
Wharton Park	Longbank, Bewdley	1993	5914.3	18	Proprietary

Below is a map which locates all the courses within Wyre Forest District. The population density of each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) within the district is also shown.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/playing-pitch-strategy-guidance/>

<sup>2</sup> Active Places Power, <https://www.activeplacespower.com/reports/access>



**Figure 1- Location of golf courses in district**

Key

Colour/Symbol	Definition
●	Affiliated course to English Golf
●	Non Affiliated private pitch and putt course
●	Non Affiliated pitch and putt public course
	LSOA area, 0-3,999 People per Sqm
	LSOA area, 4,000-5,999 People per Sqm
	LSOA area, 6,000-8,999 People per Sqm
	LSOA area, 9,000+ People per Sqm

#### Bewdley Pines Golf Club

Bewdley Pines Golf Club is an affiliated private members 18 hole golf course, situated between Kidderminster and Bewdley. The course is built on sandy soil which results in good drainage and can be used for the majority of the year. The clubhouse was extended and refurbished in 2015. The club offers full seven and five memberships with single, joint, and junior memberships.

#### Churchill and Blakedown Golf Club

Churchill and Blakedown is an affiliated private 9 members hole golf course, offering 18 tees, and is situated in Blakedown village just outside Kidderminster, the largest size town in the district. The club was founded in 1926 and a new clubhouse was constructed in 2004. The club has had a recent rise in membership, which is a result of a new 'flexup' membership category. This is based on members buying points based packages, which can be traded for the time of play on the golf course. This is an increasing trend by golf clubs in order to meet customer demand for more flexible membership packages.

### Kidderminster Golf Club

Kidderminster Golf Club is the oldest operating club in the district having been open since 1924. It is a 18 hole private members club which offers full and flexible membership options, and offers long and short game facilities.

### Little Lakes Golf Club

Little Lakes is a propriety golf club operating since 1975. It was originally a 9 hole course, which was expanded to 18 holes in 2000. The club also offers swimming, tennis and five aside football pitch facilities along with a children's play area.

### Wharton Park Golf and Country Club

Wharton Park is a propriety club run by the Club Company and is located near to Bewdley. It also has a 12 bay driving range which opened in 2013. The club also has accommodation, conference and restaurant facilities.

### Former Golf Clubs within Wyre Forest District

Burlish Golf Club, which was located between Stourport and Kidderminster, closed in 2017. This was the second closure within a five year period. At the time of closure the membership was approximately 180, having declined from 208 in 2015.

The previous tenants of the property went into creditor's voluntary liquidation in 2017. They did not pay their rent to Wyre Forest District Council and so after a period of allowing the liquidator to market the property in the hope that an assignee could be found but despite the marketing and a number of enquires they were unsuccessful. The council started and obtained forfeiture proceedings, effective from the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2018.

The course has now deteriorated and become overgrown. The former club house has now been unfortunately set on fire by arsonists in 2017 and is in a very poor condition. Any efforts to restore this as a golf course would require an unsustainable large amount of investment.

Parts of the former site are proposed for employment use (LI/12, policy 30.29) within the Wyre Forest Pre-Submission plan. Site LI/10 (Policy 30.22) also within the former golf course has been allocated for travelling showpeople. Additionally and LI/11 (Policy 33.8) has been allocated for housing.

The remaining parts of the site are envisioned to be available to public access with a proposed 6km cycle trail and nature reserve park. WFDC discussions with British Cycling have already commenced with the possibility of this trail to be installed along with a small cafe.

Cycling is a popular leisure activity. Cycling for leisure and sport has 6.2 million people taking part in at least twice in the last 28 days in the 2017/18 period<sup>3</sup>, with 36% of all cycling trips for leisure

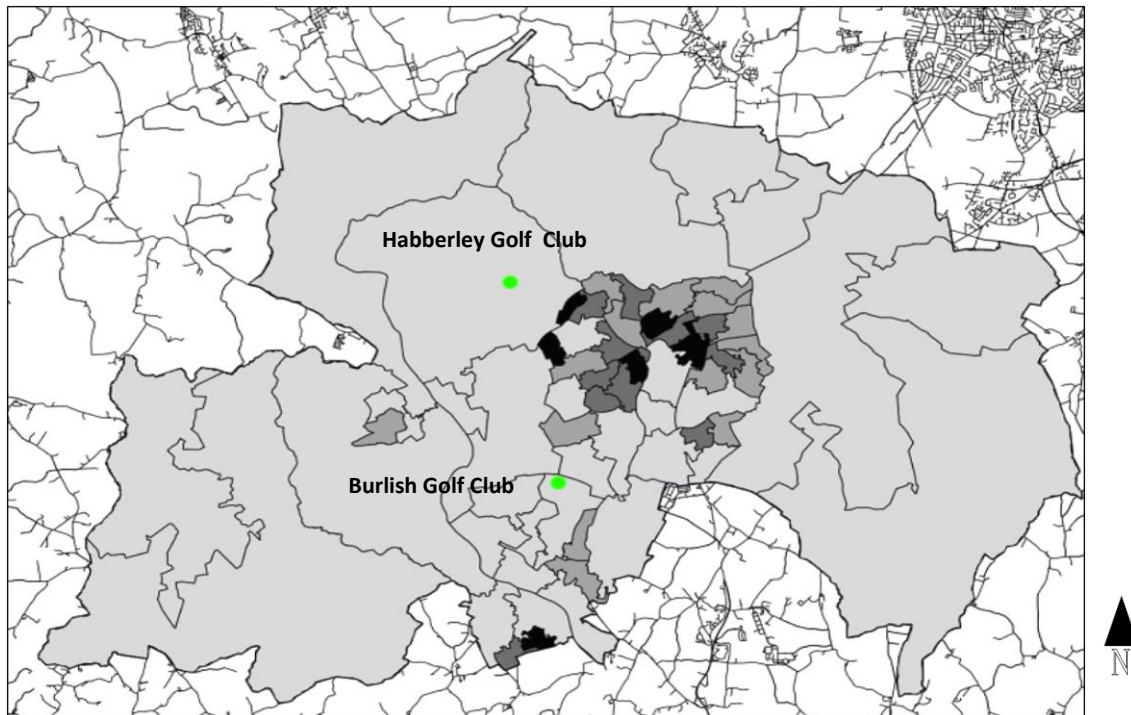
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<sup>3</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey May 17/18

purposes<sup>4</sup>. Cycling has increased in popularity in recent years. The average number of miles cycled in 2017 in the country was 54% higher than in 2002<sup>5</sup>.

This will offer a leisure facility currently not available within the district and will help to promote health and well being as encouraged in chapter 9 of the pre submission plan.

Habberley Golf Club closed in 2017. This was located in Low Habberley, outside Kidderminster. In 2016 the membership for the club was at 64, having declined from 95 in 2015.



**Figure 2 - Location of former golf courses in district**

Key

Colour/Symbol	Definition
<span style="color: green;">●</span>	Former golf course
<span style="background-color: lightgray; width: 15px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></span>	LSOA area, 0-3,999 People per Sqm
<span style="background-color: gray; width: 15px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></span>	LSOA area, 4,000-5,999 People per Sqm
<span style="background-color: darkgray; width: 15px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></span>	LSOA area, 6,000-8,999 People per Sqm
<span style="background-color: black; width: 15px; height: 10px; display: inline-block;"></span>	LSOA area, 9,000+ People per Sqm

<sup>4</sup> Department for Transport, Walking and Cycling Statistics, England:2017, p13

<sup>5</sup> Department for Transport, Walking and Cycling Statistics, England:2017, p12

### Golf Courses near to Wyre Forest District

These courses have been selected as they have been identified as being close enough to potentially draw on the golfing demand from within Wyre Forest District. They are also within the 20 minute drive time catchment for residents of Wyre Forest. Cleobury Mortimer Golf Club, (Shropshire Council) is a 27 hole affiliated club, which offers a flexible membership alongside standard membership categories.

Hagley Golf and Country Club (Bromsgrove District) is a 18 hole affiliated club, which also has a covered driving range. The club offers full seven and five memberships with single, joint, and junior memberships.

Ombersley Golf Club (Wychavon District) is a 18 hole affiliated club which offers full and flexible membership options. The club offers a covered driving range and a short game area.

**Table 2- Summary of golf courses near to Wyre Forest District<sup>6</sup>**

Course	Location	Open ed	Length (Yards)	Holes	Access Type
Cleobury Mortimer	Wyre Common, Kidderminster	1993	8612	27	Pay and Play
Hagley Golf and Country Club	Wassell Grove Lane, Bromsgrove	1979	5830	18	Pay and Play
Ombersley Golf Club	Bishops Wood Road, Droitwich	1991	5613	18	Pay and Play

Below summarises the membership fees all golf clubs within a 20 minute drive time of the district-

Golf Club	7 day Full Adult Membership (£)	5 Day Full Adult Membership (£)	Flexible Membership (£)
Bewdley Pines Golf Club	810	715	-
Churchill and Blakedown Golf Club	899	-	145-380*
Kidderminster Golf Club	995	-	-
Little Lakes Golf Club	601.80	516.80	296.80^
Wharton Park Golf Club	912	648	-
Cleobury Mortimer Golf Club	795	680	325#
Hagley Golf and Country Club	1043	761	-
Ombersley Golf Club	1135	980	220~

**Table 3- Membership Fees for 2019**

### Key

\*Flex Up Membership, on a points based membership

#Play for up to 50 rounds of golf per year

^Play for up to 20 rounds of golf per year

~Minimum price for membership at 800 points per year

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.activeplacespower.com/reports/access>

## 2- Current Demand

Using data supplied from English Golf, it can be seen that in terms of golf membership demand in Wyre Forest has been decreasing in recent years. Overall membership has approximately decreased from 2,077 in 2015, to 1,637 in 2018 with two courses closing in this period. This is a 25% decrease in overall membership.

**Table 4A- Membership numbers for affiliated Wyre Forest Golf Clubs, 2015-2018**

Club	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change +/-
Bewdley Pines	501	511	504	427	-74
Burlish Park	208	Closed	Closed	Closed	-208
Churchill & Blakedown	222	226	303	327	+105
Habberley	95	64	Closed	Closed	-95
Kidderminster	503	504	505	458	-45
Little Lakes	184	165	No Data	180	-4
Wharton Park	364	270	250	245	-119
Total	<b>2,077</b>	<b>1,740</b>	<b>1,562</b>	<b>1,637</b>	<b>-440</b>

**Table 4B- Membership numbers for affiliated golf clubs near Wyre Forest, 2015-2018**

Club	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change +/-
Cleobury Mortimer	354	313	No Data	323	-31
Hagley Golf and Country Club	614	571	552	528	-86
Omersley Golf Club	602	668	594	610	+8

This steady decrease in membership numbers can be further found both in neighbouring authorities and also nationally.

In nearby authorities Sandwell MBC<sup>7</sup> affiliated clubs have seen a 16% decrease in membership numbers 2014-2016 (1,207-1,012). In Wolverhampton CC<sup>8</sup> affiliated clubs have seen a lower 9% decrease in membership numbers from 2014-2016 (2,159-1,970).

The playing of Golf in the UK overall has dropped from 4,000,000 in 2006 to 2,785,000 in 2017<sup>9</sup>. As a country only the United States of America have more courses than the UK, with 2,667 affiliated clubs as of 2017<sup>10</sup>.

Overall golf club membership has fallen from 850,000 to 652,000 in the same period- a decline of over 23%. English Golf would like to increase the number of golf club members to 675,000 by 2021, and increase the number of people playing golf at twice a month to over 1 million<sup>11</sup>, although this is

<sup>7</sup> Sandwell MBC Playing Pitch Strategy Refresh Needs Assessment Report, Table 6.2, p100, October 2018

<sup>8</sup> Wolverhampton CC Playing Pitch Strategy, Table 9.4 p107, March 2018

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/apr/07/drive-to-get-people-playing-golf-again>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.golf-monthly.co.uk/features/the-game/should-we-worry-about-golf-clubs-closing-141082>

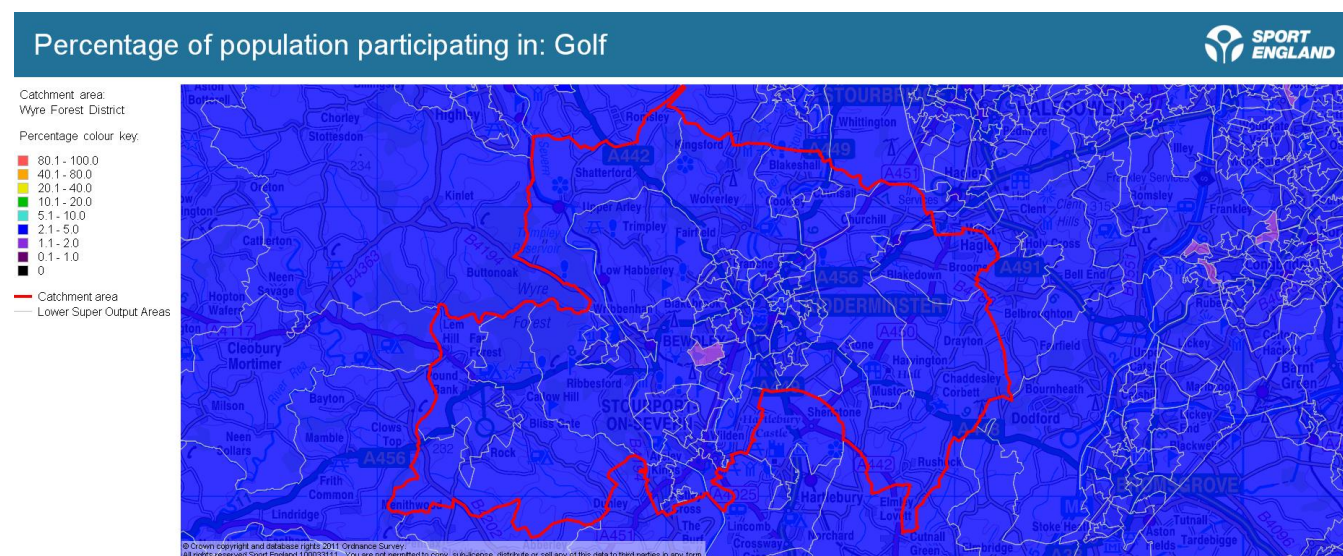
<sup>11</sup> English Golf Strategy, 2017-2021, <https://www.englandgolf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/England-Golf-2017-21-Strategy.pdf>, p18



not a strategic objective. However there is some evidence that golf participation in the last few years has increased or at least stabilised. 2018 saw a small rise in the average membership number of a golf club, up from 460 in 2017 to 484. Only 38% though of clubs in 2018 saw an increase in club membership, at an average membership price of £901 per year<sup>12</sup>.

#### Sport England Market Segmentation Data

Using Sport England Market Segmentation data<sup>13</sup> within the district all but one of the super output areas have between 2.1 to 5% of the population participating in golf, with one area located in the lower percentile of 1.1 to 2%. This is broadly consistent with the majority of local authorities in England.



**Figure 3- Percentage of population participating in Golf in Wyre Forest District (Sport England)**

#### English Golf Mapping Tool Data

English Golf has carried a large piece of research to identify golfing demand, from the 'Raising our Game Strategy' (2014). This document set out strategies to reverse the decline of club membership in England, which has been extended into the more updated *English Golf Strategy (2017-2021)*.

The types of golfing players have been divided into nine different profiles using detailed segmentation analysis. Using this data each course in Wyre Forest has identified the current demand levels, based on each profile within a 20 minute drive time.

**Table 5-Demand for Golf within Wyre Forest and the West Midlands Regions**

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.golf-monthly.co.uk/news/golf-club-membership-in-england-on-the-rise-164088>

<sup>13</sup> <http://segments.sportengland.org/results.aspx?query=Sports#output=map&map=polygon&polygonType=OA&catchmentType=focus&querySource=Sports&queryType=CharPop&sportBox=1&sport=69&sportPlay=play&focusType=LA&focusName=324>

(Based on the average number of people per club, within a 20 minute drive time)

Profile Name	Wyre Forest	West Midlands
Relaxed Members	5399	8821
Older Traditionalists	4706	7552
Younger Traditionalists	5317	8944
Younger Fanatics	5008	8033
Younger Actives	5180	8462
Late Enthusiasts	4890	7812
Occasional Time Pressed	5251	8693
Social Couples	4961	7952
Casual Fun	5006	7831

The tables below outline the current demand level for the playing categories by each affiliated club within Wyre Forest District.

**Table 6- Demand for each affiliated club**

Profile Name	Bewdley Pines	Burlish Park*	Churchill & Blakedown	Habberley*
Relaxed Members	3298	3517	8972	3670
Older Traditionalists	2878	3107	7873	3245
Younger Traditionalists	3150	3362	8692	3498
Younger Fanatics	3041	3307	8382	3452
Younger Actives	3151	3372	8603	3518
Late Enthusiasts	3003	3244	8204	3389
Occasional Time Pressed	3152	3373	8658	3515
Social Couples	3080	3288	8320	3438
Casual Fun	3089	3378	8481	3532

\*Closed

Demand for each golf club in Wyre Forest District continued-

Profile Name	Kidderminster	Little Lakes	Wharton Park
Relaxed Members	4285	2898	9449
Older Traditionalists	3909	2480	7795
Younger Traditionalists	4019	2788	10167
Younger Fanatics	4215	2592	8238
Younger Actives	4134	2756	9064
Late Enthusiasts	4098	2581	7967
Occasional Time Pressed	4099	2767	9569
Social Couples	4061	2691	8197
Casual Fun	4413	2593	7556

The table below further outlines the same data for the three golf courses previously discussed that are located close to Wyre Forest District, and draw on the local demand.



**Table 7- Golf Courses demand near to Wyre Forest**

Profile Name	Cleobury Mortimer	Hagley Golf & Country Club	Ombersley Golf Club
Relaxed Members	1686	13932	5273
Older Traditionalists	1480	11661	4617
Younger Traditionalists	1570	14042	5116
Younger Fanatics	1550	12376	4927
Younger Actives	1607	13271	5054
Late Enthusiasts	1546	12102	4815
Occasional Time Pressed	1589	13624	5092
Social Couples	1601	12490	4876
Casual Fun	1594	12012	4984

Overall the data shows that Wyre Forest is still well catered for the traditional 18 and 9 hole golf course. The existing courses in the district will be able to cater for the static or declining demand of traditional golf play even with the two recent golf course closures.

#### Alternative Golf Play

There has been an increasing trend towards more informal types of golf play. Examples of such play are Footgolf, Discgolf and Adventure golf.

Footgolf uses footballs for play and Discgolf uses discs for play to be thrown into nets. Although there is no provision within Wyre Forest for either sport, this is provided at Gaudet Lauce Golf Club, located near Droitwich within Worcestershire.

**Table 8- Alternative types of golf play located near Wyre Forest District**

Type of Golf	Course	Location	Holes
Footgolf	Halfpenny Green FootGolf	Dudley, West Midlands	9
Footgolf	Sapey FootGolf	Upper Sapey, Worcestershire	9
Footgolf	Bromsgrove FootGolf	Bromsgrove, Worcestershire	9
Footgolf	Ravenmeadow Golf Club	Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire	18
Footgolf & Discgolf	Gaudet Lauce Golf Club	Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire	9
Discgolf	Arrow Valley Country Park	Redditch, Worcestershire	18
Adventure Golf	Jungle Safari Adventure Golf, Ravenmeadow Golf Club	Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire	18

Adventure Golf, also know as crazy or miniature golf, is an informal family friendly golf play, with holes being themed with additional objects to play through. The nearest adventure golf course to

the district is the newly opened Jungle Safari Adventure Golf in Droitwich Spa. Some traditional courses have been recently installing adventure courses with positive results. For example Horton Park in Surrey, has doubled its food and beverage business in five years<sup>14</sup> by introducing adventure and foot golf along with maintaining its traditional golf course.

As discussed there is two pitch and putt facilities within the district but currently none of the above variants are available.

### 3- Summary

- Wyre Forest District is well catered for the play of traditional 18 and 9 hole courses, even with the recent closures of two courses. There is an adequate supply of courses within a 20 minute drive time to the residents of the district.
- Future demand can be accommodated with the current supply of golf courses, with emphasis to be placed on existing clubs to retain members and encourage greater casual play. This could be done by encouraging greater flexible membership packages or to investigate whether to offer alternative golf play such as Footgolf or Discgolf.
- It is the council's view that it is not economically viable to reopen Burlish Golf Course as a traditional 18 or 9 hole course, nor has the council received any other golf use proposals. Through this review it has been shown that this course is surplus to requirements for the overall demand of play within the district, which meets paragraph 97 of the NPPF.
- Parts of the former course have been allocated for development in the WFDC pre-submission plan. This will help to meet the demand of the district for housing (LI/11), employment (LI/12) and allocation for travelling showpeople in the plan period (LI/10).
- The current scheme envisions alternative leisure and recreational use on site with a family friendly cycle route, supported by British Cycling. The proposed introduction of the cycle trail will offer a facility that is currently not available. This fulfils paragraph 97 in which the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision. This is also consistent with Sport England Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance in which where it has been determined that some spare capacity cannot be used for pitch sports then it is acceptable to relocate some of the provision to other outdoor sports such as cycling.<sup>15</sup>

This report will form part of the evidence base of the playing pitch strategy for the emerging Local Plan. This report will be subject to further reviews during the plan period to be based on updated evidence of golf use in the district.

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<sup>14</sup> English Golf Case Study Horton Park, <https://www.englishgolf.org/download/case-study-horton-park/>

<sup>15</sup> Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance, Sport England, p49, October 2013