

SLIDE ONE

My name is Mark Howard and I am a member of Hoylake Village Life, HVL for short, a non-profit, volunteer-led Community Interest Company.

SLIDE TWO

I'm here with my colleague Julian Priest. HVL have been involved in setting up and supporting a number of projects in Hoylake in recent years, including:

- **Hoylake Community Cinema**, which screens films here once a month and is a great community event – please do come if you've not been;
- **The Beacon Steering Group** which has developed plans for a new two screen cinema in the Old Town Hall with artists and makers retail and studio units;
- **The Hoylake Christmas Lights group**, which Julian and a great team of volunteers have done an amazing job with this year;
- **Hoylake Vision Community Planning Forum** which produced a Neighbourhood Development Plan – an NDP for short – in consultation with the local community and which passed at a local referendum just over a year ago. *(The NDP is now part of the council's local plan, and I can answer questions about how that might impact on the council's proposals later on);* and
- **This 'alternative' Eco-Golf Resort, Wildfowl and Wetland Centre project**, which I'm about to set out in more detail today.

SLIDE THREE

Now I just want to mention who we have consulted over the course of this project:

- **Gareth Bradbury** SENIOR CONSULTANT Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Consulting Ltd
- **Nigel Symes** BUSINESS ADVICE UNIT LEADER RSPB
- **Sam Thomas** PROGRAMME DIRECTOR The Golf Environment Organisation
- **David McLay Kidd** ARCHITECT, MACHRIHANISH DUNES DMK Golf Design
- **Dr Keith Duff** [RETIRED] EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF SCIENTIST, ENGLISH NATURE (NATURAL ENGLAND)
- **Peter Wilson** CHARTERED FORESTER & CHARTERED ENVIRONMENTALIST

All of these people believe this to be a credible and achievable project... we've done our homework.

SLIDE FOUR

When HVL formed in 2009 to explore ways of tackling the issue of empty shops – Hoylake had a 25% vacancy rate at the time – the council’s idea of a ‘Five Star Golf Resort’ was at a very embryonic stage. Alarm bells were already ringing for us because of question around funding... we suspected that some kind of development – residential, leisure & retail or commercial, would be in the minds of the council.

So in 2011 we produced this document. Some of you may have seen an earlier iteration of this; we’ve now updated and printed a couple of hundred copies of it, so please do take one away.

Over the years we have showed it to lots of people including our ward councillors and I’m sorry to say, until very recently, it was met with, at best, ambivalence, perhaps fuelled by a significant degree of incredulity that the council’s “Five Star Resort” project would actually go ahead.

Well, six years on, here we find ourselves; and in our view this document is more relevant than ever. But still with very little political support or formal council recognition. We hope this presentation will change that.

In essence this booklet suggests that the council need to consider integrating a commercially operated Wildfowl and Wetland Centre on the site; capitalising on growing trends for eco-tourism, making the most of our existing natural assets and Natura 2000 protections; SSSI, RAMSAR, SAC and pSPA status.

SLIDE FIVE

We think this type of diversification will create a significantly less risky and, longer term, a much more sustainable underlying business model for the project than relying on the 'up front' revenue from residential development. Let's think about future generations! Note the gratuitous use of the Cute ducklings.

Wildfowl and Wetland Centres are economically and environmentally sustainable, they bring in huge footfall, create rewarding local employment and provide many wonderful education and leisure opportunities.

We have spoken to various organisations, including Wirral Wildlife, the WWT, the RSPB and the Golf Environment Organisation, and we have found universal consensus that **if designed and managed well**, golf courses DO benefit the environment and ARE havens for wildlife.

But there's a big difference between water features that may attract some wildlife and make the game more exciting for players, and improving an entire wetland and coastal ecosystem.

One of our advisers has been David McLay Kidd, architect of the Machrihanish Dunes resort in Kintyre; cited as one of the most eco-friendly coastal golf courses in the world. Check YouTube for "Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club" to see how he approached that project.

SLIDE SIX

At the same time we've also expressed concerns about the Council's Beach Management Plan and did some research into it... and we uncovered some real concerns about that amid a lot of misinformation going around.

So you may be thinking ... uh oh... why is he talking about the beach?

Well, because many of the same birds live and feed on the shore as well as inland; the area of the proposed Golf Resort includes roosting areas for the Black-tailed Godwit for example.

It is all part of a complex ecosystem in need of tender loving care, not two completely separate environments.

You see... it makes no sense to us to even consider a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre over there while on Hoylake beach, which the birds also use, the only long term 'plan' in evidence is to spray Glyphosate *ad infinitum* in the complete absence of *any* qualitative or quantitative data about the natural coastal processes that are taking place.

SLIDE SEVEN

In case you don't already know, we should point out that the EU classification of Glyphosate states, "*Dangerous for the environment; Toxic to aquatic organisms, may cause long-term adverse effects in the aquatic environment and Chronic (long-term) aquatic hazard*". Manufacturers Monsanto, perhaps unsurprisingly, say the exact opposite.

A meeting about beach management at St Lukes Church in 2013 clearly demonstrated a polarised view on the issues; it seems many people are content with doing "whatever it takes", including spraying chemicals, to "remove the grass", while a similar number are very much against it.

The conclusion of Natural England is that scraping, digging and roto-burying techniques serve only to spread the grass – rather than to remove it. So they have approved further spraying using Glyphosate.

In our view – and one that seems to be shared by a growing number of local people – the current approach to beach management is ultimately doomed to failure... a futile effort to pause or reverse inevitable, natural coastal processes.

SLIDE EIGHT

But the use of glyphosate is NOT the only option. We need to be thinking differently. And this proposed Resort may help us to do that.

What was particularly interesting from that meeting was an offer of BOTH Liverpool Universities to explore the idea of conducting reversible field trials, as recommended in this excellent report from almost 20 years ago, by Alan Jemmett of Merseyside Environmental Advisory Services, a report which came to the same conclusion back then. 20 years!

Perhaps those studies could be funded by the DONG Energy Coastal Communities Fund over the long term?

SLIDE NINE

Because there's another issue which is not going to go away in a hurry... increasing flood risk as sea levels rise and global warming impacts on so many aspects of our lives...

It is widely accepted that dunes, slacks and wetland systems are a highly efficient coastal flood defence, much cheaper and more effective than hard defences.

So again, because the proposed Resort is in a flood risk area we can't talk about landscaping the land for a 'Golf Resort', or even for a Wetland Centre, without thinking through the issues of flood defences and reducing, rather than increasing, flood risk to residents, businesses and infrastructure. So that also means thinking about the beach.

If you look online you'll find very informative video about the environment agency's fantastic work with the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust on this very issue at Steart Marshes.

You see, whether we like it or not, the land being considered for the proposed Golf resort, and the beach, are inextricably linked.

Anything to do with the environment, and with nature, must be viewed holistically. At the moment there is a worrying disconnect in this regard in the council's approach to the Golf Resort and the beach and I think we need to join the dots while gaining a better understanding of the issues.

WWT would be the right partners for this.

SLIDE TEN

We don't actually have a problem with there being a Golf Resort in principle. Whilst it's true that golf club membership has been in decline, golf tourism is showing signs of growth. As a CIC that supports economic development, we see this as an opportunity, but not at any cost.

We're thinking holistically: the Beacon Scheme would be a great way to ensure visitors leave a hotel and venture into Hoylake!

We just can't support the Golf Resort project if it is to be funded by the building of 150 luxury houses, whether on Greenbelt or not. We can't support it if it is to be one where the only water features are there to look pretty and make the game a tad more tricky. We can't support it when there appears to have been no real consideration or consultation on how wildlife there, and on the beach, will be impacted by its design and long-term maintenance.

And we certainly don't support a course which will have a heavy reliance on chemicals.

As we have found it is quite possible to build a golf course that uses the absolute bare minimum, and even in parts bans chemicals, unlike on our beach at the moment!

SLIDE ELEVEN

We suggest that high level conversations **should** be happening between the council, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, RSPB, Golf Environment Organisation, The Environment Agency, Liverpool Universities, DONG Energy Community Benefit Fund and others.

The project could deliver a world class eco-golf resort, integrated with a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, that provides much greater opportunities for employment, leisure and education, whilst enhancing and protecting wildlife; and taking a long term, holistic view towards improving flood defences and reducing flood risk.

We have introduced the council to WWT twice now but, sadly they have not taken up the offer; sadly no conversation has taken place.

SLIDE TWELVE

I just want to read the most recent correspondence received from Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Consulting's Senior Consultant Director Gareth Bradbury:

“Your proposal ... certainly lays out a plan true to the ethos of ‘sustainable development.’ It ensures, through a diverse offer, that the landscape is changed only positively, biodiversity is protected and where possible enhanced, and economic benefits come from a network of strong, ethically sound ventures, fully integrated with the local community.

SLIDE THIRTEEN

“We continue to look forward to helping in all/any stages of such a project, from data collection, feasibility studies (particularly for a visitor centre and wetland habitat enhancements), stakeholder engagement events, concept and detailed designs (including Sustainable Drainage Schemes and Wetland Treatment Systems, working with an architect for building design if necessary), drawing up specifications for contractors, site supervision during construction and writing management (visitor centre and habitat) plans.

SLIDE FOURTEEN

“I heard nothing back from the Council after you [again] put me in touch with them, so it might be, pending the outcome of the meeting on 9th December, that we arrange a teleconference with key staff to see what they may require from us.

“[It is] definitely worth including the Environment Agency and Natural England as stakeholders so all these things can be considered in one plan. All power to your elbow!”

SLIDE FIFTEEN

We hope this presentation and this document will give you food for thought and that the 'Stop the Hoylake Golf Resort' Group, along with others, as well as those who support the current Golf Resort plans, will get behind this proposal and encourage the council to rethink and dramatically reshape their plans in the light of this.

We also hope Margaret Greenwood and our Ward Councillors will get behind these proposals.

And before I wrap this up please consider one thing.

If this eco-golf resort idea goes ahead, even if it eventually fails, the wildfowl and wetland centre – which will not fail, will lend much, much greater protection against further development.

There is NOTHING to lose by supporting this. It can, and should be, better.