Assessing Short Term, Large Scale Sporting Events

Evaluating the potential environmental effects of hosting large-scale sporting events has presented a range of challenges in EIA terms. Turley has recently coordinated the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment for a proposed championship golf resort and associated housing development (c. 1,000 homes). The course and supporting facilities have been designed to the standards required to host the Ryder Cup and other European Tour golf tournaments.

In addition to identifying the likely significant effects associated with the construction and day to day operation of the golf resort and housing development, the need to consider the likely significant effects (albeit temporary and short term) of hosting internationally significant golf events was also identified to be necessary. Assessing the likely significant effects of hosting such events, which will only be held a number of years in the future and for which there is a relatively limited amount of information available (in advance of formally securing the rights to host), presented a number of challenges in EIA terms; not least regarding defining parameters and limitations / assumptions.

Below, we explain the process which was followed in ensuring that this aspect of the environmental assessment was robust.

What we knew

The planning application explained the applicant’s aspiration to bid for and secure the rights to host the 2026 Ryder Cup.

A successful bid simultaneously secures rights to host European Tour events over a number of years.

It was also explained that the staging of internationally significant golf events necessitates the erection of a range of temporary buildings, structures and other facilities including hospitality pavilions, on-site parking, facilities for world-wide media coverage, and spectator grandstands. Such tournaments also require the temporary provision of off-site park and ride facilities on land situated in proximity to key arterial routes, for use by visitors to the golf tournament. Whilst the physical adverse effects of hosting the events are relatively short term, socio-economic benefits can be significant over the medium-long term.

What we didn’t know

Whilst the need for a significant amount of temporary infrastructure was well understood, there was a number of “unknowns”. These included: the exact timings of the events and tournaments; the required quantum / location / scale of on-site temporary facilities; the length of time the temporary facilities were required to be in place; the potential number of visitors and the potential location of the off-site park and ride facilities.

How did we assess the likely significant effects?

Assessing the likely significant effects of hosting internationally significant golf events required a number of development parameters to be defined through discussion with the design team and for any limitations / assumptions to be clearly articulated.
In order to ensure that the assessment considered the “worst case scenario” it was based upon the infrastructure required to host the Ryder Cup; this being the largest scale golf event likely to be held at the course.

A review of the infrastructure provided in association with other Ryder Cup competitions as well as other tour events allowed the team to identify realistic development parameters and assumptions for the ‘unknowns’. It also allowed an illustrative masterplan to be developed which identified the likely layout of the temporary facilities such as the hospitality areas and scale of grandstands. This masterplan and the associated parameters formed the basis of the assessment undertaken.

A review of visitor numbers associated with other events also enabled the team to define the likely amount of vehicular traffic and the scale / location of off-site park and ride facilities that would be required.

The assessment considered the likely significant effects associated with the construction of the temporary facilities, hosting the Ryder Cup, and decommissioning the various structures and facilities. Some significant adverse effects and impacts (prior to mitigation) included: impacts on traffic congestion and associated air quality effects; the impacts on noise sensitive receptors from visitors and equipment; and the effects from contamination from the use of temporary diesel generators and other potential polluting equipment.

This approach allowed the team to identify the mitigation measures considered to be necessary.

These mitigation measures were incorporated into an Outline Construction and Environmental Plan (for construction / decommissioning effects) and an Outline Event and Traffic Management Plan (for operational effects). A planning condition was offered which requires these documents to be updated if the rights to host the competition are secured and when additional information is available. Where required, a Supplemental ES will be prepared when the additional event information is available.

Lessons Learnt

From this process we have learnt the following:

• Identifying a realistic “worst case” scenario, along with “assumptions” and “limitations” is key to identifying realistic mitigation;

• The production of outline management plans (with mechanisms for these to be updated when more / better information about the future sports event is known) allows the determining authority and public to understand how such large scale events can be managed to reduce / avoid likely significant impacts.

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