



Out! Andy Murray set to lose £500,000 as High Court quashes plans for golf club

Another major loser will be the unique chalklands of the Leatherhead Downs, which some feel may never recover from the damage already done by the developers

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His victory at Wimbledon might have earned him £1.6m in prize money – not to mention the hearts of a grateful nation – but Andy Murray could soon find himself £500,000 out of pocket after a botched investment in an exclusive Surrey golf course.

The Beaverbrook Golf Club would have been the 141st course in the county, where Murray lives with his girlfriend, Kim Sears, but 10 days ago a High Court judge quashed the planning permission granted to developers Longshot Ltd.

The firm must now restore the course site to its original condition, unless it lodges a successful appeal. The cost, thought to be hundreds of thousands, will be added to legal costs and loss of income if the course is not built.

Advertising mogul Sir Frank Lowe also invested £250,000 in the project, which planned to turn the home of the late press baron Lord Beaverbrook, Cherkley Court near Leatherhead, into a hotel and spa, with the golf course.

But another major loser will be the unique chalklands of the Leatherhead Downs, which some feel may never recover from the damage already done.

Mole Valley District Council allowed the project last year against the advice of its planning officers and warnings from environmental experts. Local campaigners challenged the decision in the High Court and won.

Mr Justice Haddon-Cave found the council's decision to grant planning permission on such an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was perverse, and that the council had "erred in law".

The requirement to restore the site arises because Longshot decided to carry on as if its planning permission were unassailable, and cleared meadows. Environmental law specialist Richard Buxton, for the campaigners, obtained legal undertakings from Longshot to undo any damage if it lost. "It is particularly gratifying having the court so explicitly recognising that what may be profitable for developers is not necessarily in the public interest," he said.

Longshot said it was "amazed" and "appalled" at the ruling. The judge denied leave to appeal, but the firm is expected to try anyway.

Professor David Hawksworth CBE, a former Council of English Nature member and a local resident, said there should have been no "physical disturbance or spraying" without "scientific assessment" of the site by skilled specialists.

John Northcott, portfolio holder of planning at Mole Valley District Council, said: "We will now need to take time to consider what our next steps will be."