

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 62A Applications)
Planning application for Erection of 91no. dwellings with associated infrastructure
and landscaping. Provision of playing field and associated clubhouse.
at
Former Friends School Field, Mount Pleasant Lane, Saffron Walden



Community Engagement

No public consultation has been undertaken in respect of this proposal. There is no legal requirement to engage with the community prior to the submission of a planning application.

The application does however follow the submission of a hybrid planning application that was refused in March 2021, the details of which are set out in the supporting Planning Statement. The proposal has considered the reasons for refusal and sought to respond to the comments made as part of that submission.

A pre-application advice request was submitted to the Local Planning Authority and after extensive delays, a response was finally received. The response only considered matters relating to the earlier application and provided no feedback on the scheme layout or design proposed. A full response was requested and has never been received.

A separate pre-application submission was sent to Sport England who have welcomed the proposal to bring back into use some playing provision and provided useful feedback from both the FA and the ECB. Those comments have been accommodated where possible.

A copy of the pre-application responses are attached.



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Ms Ms L Fitzgerald
Barker Parry Town
33 Bancroft,
Hitchin,
Herts
SG5 1LA

7th March 2024

Your ref:-----

Our ref: UTT/23/3089/PA

Please ask for Matt Kolaszewski on [REDACTED]
email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Fitzgerald,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (as amended)

Re: Pre Application for Erection of 90 dwellings, with associated open space and sports pitches with associated changing facility.

I refer to your preliminary enquiry submitted to Uttlesford District Council on the 04 December 2023. I have examined your submitted documents, including all indicative drawings which inform the submitted proposal.

Site Description

The site comprises the former playing fields of the former Friends School located off Mount Pleasant Road in the southern part of Saffron Walden. The site is located within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area (zone 6). Adjoining the site to the west are the former school buildings and sports facilities which are currently being converted and developed into residential use, with ancillary facilities.

To the south west of the site is a residential development known as 'The Avenue'. To the southern and south eastern boundaries are significant tree belts and open space. The eastern boundary is also well tree'd beyond which are residential properties. The northern boundary of the site consists of mature trees fronting onto Mount Pleasant Road. Access to the site is currently via the main part of the school site, which itself benefits from an access onto Mount Pleasant Road.

The site extends to approximately 6.567ha and is comprised of the former playing fields associated with the Friends School. The site generally slopes downwards north to south and there are two groups of trees protruding into the site in the south easter quarter.

Analysis

In 2019 an application was submitted for the development of this land



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(application ref: UTT/19/1744/OP) was refused. There were a total of eight reasons for refusal (with one being duplicated in error). These are listed below with commentary below them as to how the current pre-app submission has, or hasn't addressed the reasons:

1. The scheme of development conflicts with ULP Policies S1, ENV1, ENV3, GEN1, GEN2, GEN8 Essex Design Guide and the NPPF, as the design, layout, scale and appearance of the development is considered inappropriate in terms of the character of the site and surrounding area. In addition, the development would erode a distinctive protected open space of significant importance to the character of this area of Saffron Walden, as well as the conservation area and the locally listed school buildings.

The site remains designated as a protected open space. To this end, whilst it is acknowledged that the use of the site as a school playing field has ceased and given the redevelopment of the wider school site, will no longer be required for this particular purpose, the open space itself remains protected. There therefore remains an in principal objection to the redevelopment of the site.

The pre-app submission relies heavily on the fact that the playing fields have not been used since the school closed in 2017. Whilst accepted that this is the case, it does not follow that this means there is no need for the open space. The open space has not been used by the public since 2017 because they have been unable to access it and as such the fact it's been unused is not considered to be a strong argument for why the site should be redeveloped.

There do not appear to have been any information submitted in terms of the design of proposed buildings and so no further comment can be provided on this element of the refusal.

2. The submitted layout plans indicating the proposed sports uses and activities are located such that the immediate environs of the new residential properties, will incur, at close quarters, significant disturbance from noise, floodlighting, parking as well as the general coming and going of visitors to the facilities which would be in conflict with ULP Policies GEN2 and GEN4, and the NPPF.

It is acknowledged that you have sought to address this reason for refusal by essentially flipping the layout of the development and moving the playing fields from the north of the site along Mount Pleasant Road to the southern section of the site. You have also changed the facility from a MUGA to grass pitches (2 x football or 1 x cricket) and in doing so increase the area of sports pitches proposed marginally. However, the comments from Sport England on the original app which was refused stated that they required a 3G pitch. This is not what is proposed. You will need to justify why the proposal is sufficient to meet local demand when the modern trend is for 3G style pitches that can be utilised for a wider range of activities. You state in your submission that given the length of time that has elapsed since the school field was last used (over 5 years) you are no longer required to consult Sport England. I have reviewed the



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criteria and have not come across this. The Council's position remains that this is a protected open space with playing fields.

The playing field may not have been in use but that is because the site owners have not opened it to public use in that time for various reasons and not because there is no requirement for them. For this reason, should an application be forthcoming, we will consult Sport England and follow their advice. The starting point for your scheme remains that you should follow the guidance they provided in their assessment of the previous planning application in regard to the requirements set out by Sport England. Given they wanted a 3G pitch, this will likely by its very nature be an all year-round facility requiring floodlighting etc. Further it will likely need to be rented to local groups during evenings and weekends. This in turn will mean that noise and disturbance from lighting will become an issue that needs to be addressed in any future submission.

Given the constraints of the site (it is essentially encircled by housing) it is considered that no matter where you will put the sports pitches, they will cause noise and disturbance to neighbouring properties owing to the proximity to housing especially in summer months when people are enjoying their gardens – both existing dwellings surrounding the site as well as those within the proposal once they are built. I would advise that a robust management plan is submitted with any future application together with mitigation measures. The goal of this proposal needs to be to provide playing fields/sports pitches etc that are of such a standard that outweighs the harm of the loss of the remainder of the site. It is considered the current proposal fails to achieve this.

3. The proposal is not considered to represent sustainable development in the context of Paragraph 8 of the NPPF, as it cannot show that the economic, social and environmental aspects of the development are satisfied in a positive and beneficial way. The development scheme as submitted, will involve a detrimental impact on the conservation area, the loss of protected playing fields and sports facilities and the locally listed school buildings. Paragraph 11 NPPF, requires full assessment of the benefits that will accrue from the development to show that it will result in a positive contribution. The loss of the protected sports fields, the impact on nearby locally listed buildings and the conservation area would outweigh the benefits of the scheme, especially with limited level of mitigation being proposed. Notwithstanding the fact that the council does not have a 5 year housing supply at present, the type of housing being proposed is not compliant with the housing officers requirements in terms of mix, layout, scale and design. This is a further significant issue that weighs against the development of the site and helps tilt the balance in the consideration of para 11, NPPF. The proposed development is therefore contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan Policies S1, LC1, ENV1 and GEN2.

It is not clear from the pre-app submission exactly how this reason for refusal has been addressed. A Heritage Impact Assessment should be submitted with any future application that clearly demonstrates how you believe this has been overcome.



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4. The proposal does not show that the development of this site would involve a positive contribution to bio-diversity and protected species in the local area, which is in conflict with Local Plan Policy GEN7 and the NPPF.

Any future submission will need to show that the development meets Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and provides a positive contribution to protected species.

5. The planning application does not include a health impact assessment (HIA) or propose any mitigation of the healthcare impacts arising from the proposed development, without this detail and assessment the application cannot be supported. This is contrary to Local Plan Policy GEN6

This can be overcome with the submission of an HIA and should be straight forward.

6. The applicant has not established that this site is redundant in terms of its longstanding sports use, nor has it been shown that there is an excess of sports facilities and playing fields similar to the application site, consequently the loss of this open space area is unacceptable and against UDP Policy LC1.

As per reason no. 2 above, this would need to be fully justified. You have said that the site has not been in use since the school closed which is fine, however there seems to have been no efforts to open it to the public at any stage during the long planning process to redevelop the school etc so if the site is redundant it is purely because of the developers actions and not because there was no need for the use. There appears to be little attempt to demonstrate that there is an over provision of sports pitches in the area.

7. The 2005 Local Plan Policy ENV1 specifically provides that Outline Applications for development within Conservation Areas will not be considered, this application incorporates the largest part of the site as an outline proposal which is unacceptable without detailed information.

This can be overcome with the submission of a full application.

8. The 2005 Local Plan Policy ENV1 specifically provides that Outline Applications for development within Conservation Areas will not be considered, this application incorporates the largest part of the site as an outline proposal which is unacceptable without detailed information.

See 7 above.

Summary and Conclusions



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In light of the above appraisal and for the reasons highlighted, there is an objection in principle to residential development on this site due to the conflict with the open space policies in the 2005 Local Plan.

Furthermore, concerns remain around the type of open space proposed as well the quantum, in light of what the area of open space being lost. In addition to this, given the constraints of the site concerns also remain around the possible noise nuisance to disturbance to existing homes as well as future residents of the proposed development.

You will appreciate that the views expressed in this letter are those of an officer which do not bind any Members of the Council's planning committee should an application come before them for formal consideration.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this letter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Matt Kolaszewski
Strategic Applications Officer

Liz Fitzgerald
Managing Director
Barker Parry Town Planning Ltd

Byemail only

Date: 26th June 2024

Your Ref: LF/23061

Site: Former Friends School Playing Fields, Walden Road, Saffron Walden

Proposal: Sports Pitches and Changing Facilities

Sport England Reference: PA/24/E/UT/67841

Thank you for seeking advice the above pre-application proposal. I would provide the following pre-application advice response to the proposal:

Sport England – Non Statutory Role and Policy

It is understood that the site forms part of, or constitutes land last used as playing field. However, as the playing field (the former Friends School playing field) has not been used for at least five years, any future consultation with Sport England by the local planning authority will not be a statutory requirement in the context of the requirements of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (Statutory Instrument 2015 No. 595).

Notwithstanding the non-statutory nature of the consultation, Sport England has considered the proposal in the light of the National Planning Policy Framework (particularly Para 103) and Sport England's policy on planning applications affecting playing fields [REDACTED] which states:

'Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of:

- all or any part of a playing field, or
- land which has been used as a playing field and remains undeveloped, or
- land allocated for use as a playing field

unless, in the judgement of Sport England, the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions which are set out in the annex to this response.'

The Proposal and Assessment against Sport England's Objectives and the NPPF

In summary, the pre-application proposal involves re-establishing part of the former Friends School's playing field for community use. This would involve options for football and cricket pitch provision on an area to the south of the site. The pitches would be supported by a clubhouse and ancillary car parking. As the scope of the pre-application advice request has focused on the design and layout of the re-established playing field the following comments relate to the proposals for this. However, it is acknowledged that there will be related proposals for the majority of the former school playing fields to the north. Sport England would be happy to provide comments on the wider proposals for the site when more information is available.

The principle of re-establishing part of the former school's playing field is welcomed by Sport England. As set out in the Action Plan in Uttlesford District Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (2019), the recommended action for this site was to bring the former school playing fields back into use to help reduce current and future community football and cricket pitch shortfalls in the Saffron Walden area. The proposal to bring part of the site back into football and cricket pitch use would therefore offer potential to help address current and future shortfalls. It should be noted that Uttlesford District Council is currently preparing a new Playing Pitch Strategy to support the emerging Local Plan which is due to be published later in 2024. The new strategy will be expected to provide an up-to-date position on local football/cricket pitch shortfalls and recommendations for the future of this site.

I have consulted the Football Foundation (who represent the FA and the Essex County FA) and the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) for their feedback on the potential layouts of the pitches and the pavilion design and they have provided the following feedback:

Football Foundation

- The playing pitch strategy for Uttlesford (2019) shows that there is a shortfall of grass football pitches within the area. Essex County FA has stated that the largest pitches sizes that would be able to fit in the area would be the most beneficial to support meeting the demand within the local area.
- In terms of the proposed layout of the pitches the drawing that has a single senior 11v11 pitch marked out on an east-west orientation would not work if the site is also to be used for cricket as a football pitch cannot be marked out over a cricket square due to the need to protect the cricket pitches

during the winter period.

- The layout which has the U11-12 and U13-14 pitches side by side would be suitable if a cricket square could be accommodated between the football pitches. However, there would need to be sufficient run off areas and spectator space around the football pitches without overlapping with the cricket square.
- In due course, it would be useful to engage with Saffron Walden Community FC regarding the most suitable pitch sizes to be marked out on the site to meet their needs as they are the principal football club in the local area who would be most likely to use the pitches.
- The proposed clubhouse design appears to be extreme for the proposed activity at the site. The 4 team changing rooms are excessive for the amount of pitches proposed at the site and this could be reduced to a 2-team changing room. In addition, if dimensions could be provided for the rooms in the clubhouse that would be useful. The reduction of the changing rooms/clubhouse could lead to less grass pitch space been taken and more pitch space could be available to increase the pitch sizes or provide an additional pitch. Guidance on changing room area sizes is set out in the Football Foundation's guidance [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Consideration is requested to be given to whether the kitchen could be located somewhere else to allow an external serving hatch. Finally, is there need for a full bar and cellar? A modest kitchen servery may be sufficient.

ECB

- The minimum number of fine turf pitches that would be acceptable and sustainable in a cricket square would be six pitches (an 18.29m wide square). A two fine turf pitch square would not be supported. The average square size is 10 pitches, and a non turf pitch (artificial pitch) would be recommended in addition to provide additional capacity for junior cricket especially. The site would offer potential to accommodate a six pitch square and a non turf pitch, alongside the two football pitches proposed either side. The total width required for a cricket square and outfield plus minimum run-off would be 129 metres i.e. 52m outfield radius including runoff + 2.74 non turf pitch + 18.29 six pitch square + 56m outfield radius plus minimum run-off. A single non turf pitch on its own is not going to produce a sustainable site from a cricket perspective.
- The floor plan needs to be provide changing area sizes to allow informed comment to be made. A minimum area of 20 sq.m is required for cricket for

each team changing room (excluding showers, dry off areas, toilets and lobbies).

- Pavilion location is ideal for cricket, being sited in the north west corner.
- For the scale of provision planned, the club room looks small at approximately 50m² (70/80m²+ would be more appropriate). There is an opportunity to provide a larger clubroom by reducing some of the corridor space.
- Lockers are better incorporated into changing rooms
- The internal padding up area as shown will only provide a restricted view of the pitch. This needs to be reviewed.
- Three shower cubicles per team changing room is required as a minimum for cricket
- Officials changing rooms need to add benching.
- Ball strike risk to the existing residential properties to the west will need to be assessed. If this proposal is progressed, a risk assessment (details can be provided) will need to be prepared to support a planning application based upon an agreed cricket square layout. It is expected that some limited netting will be required on the western boundary to protect the amenity of residents.
- Car parking is considered to be appropriate at 30+ spaces.

Conclusion

It is requested that consideration is given to the above comments when progressing the plans for the proposals in order to help ensure that the design and layout of the proposals is fit for purpose and responsive to the needs of potential users. Sport England and the sports governing bodies would be happy to provide feedback on further iterations of the design and layout of the proposals upon request.

This advice is made without prejudice to our position on the proposals for the wider former Friends School playing fields site as it is not possible to provide informed comment on the development proposals for the wider site at this stage. I would be happy to provide advice in due course when more information is available.

I hope that this pre-application advice is helpful and I would be willing to discuss it if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Roy Warren
Planning Manager



Annex

Sport England's 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at: [REDACTED]

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy are:

Exception 1

A robust and up-to-date assessment has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment, which will remain the case should the development be permitted, and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.

Exception 2

The proposed development is for ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field, and does not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or otherwise adversely affect their use.

Exception 3

The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:

- reduce the size of any playing pitch;
- result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);
- reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;
- result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site;
- or
- prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.

Exception 4

The area of playing field to be lost as a result of the proposed development will be replaced, prior to the commencement of development, by a new area of playing field:

- of equivalent or better quality, and
- of equivalent or greater quantity, and
- in a suitable location, and
- subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements.

Exception 5

The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.