

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 5, 2024 9:18 AM  
**To:** Section 62A Applications <section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Section 62A Planning Application: S62A/2024/0057 Former Friends School Field, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 3EB  
**Importance:** High

Saffron Walden Community Football Club is an England 3-Star Accredited football club based in Saffron Walden. We have 75 affiliated teams with nearly 1,000 registered players, most of whom are children. We are the largest girls football club in the area and have boys' teams, adult male and female league and social teams, a pan-disability group and "walking football". We are also a registered Charity.

We currently use 11 different venues for football training and matches, many of which are remote from Saffron Walden, including the villages of Great Chesterford, Newport, Wimbish, Ashdon, Debden, Radwinter, Littlebury and Great Chishill. This is primarily because of the lack of capacity in the facilities within Saffron Walden.

The reality is that we could expand our football operations further, but we are prevented from doing so by the restrictions we face on facilities.

Our Local Authority has not had an adopted Development Plan since 2005, and since that time there has been a well-documented and very significant growth in the population of the Town. The Census data showed growth in Uttlesford was circa 15% between 2011 and 2021, which is very much higher than the national average of 6.6% and the average for the East of England at 8.3% <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000077/>

Concurrent with that population expansion, we have permanently lost football playing facilities (to residential development) at the Bell Language College, Ridgeons and of course, now at the Friends (Walden) School. There were three football pitches at the Friends School as well as a cricket square with nine wickets (and other facilities including the tennis courts, MUGA and swimming pool).

Where limited new playing facilities have been provided, they have either been fewer/smaller than the original (Bell College replaced by a small Colts grass football pitch at Crabtrees), of very low quality (new pitches at Lime Avenue, and Crabtrees) or no facilities at all have been delivered (Ridgeons, where a "5-a-side pitch" was shown but never provided by the Developer, to replace a 9-a-side grass pitch).

At the Friends School site, we have lost what were without question the best football pitches in the area in terms of scale, flatness, playing surface quality, facilities and car parking. The three football pitches were used extensively and over a long period of time by our Club and others.

Since the acquisition and closure of the facility by Chase New Homes, we have monitored the various applications closely. The current Planning Application for the Friends site was of course expected. Indeed, from 2022 and throughout the whole of 2023, our Club Secretary was involved in discussion with Chase New Homes about football facilities that might be retained on the site, and also extensive discussions were held around an "offsite" contribution to something meaningful which would collectively provide adequate compensation to our Community for the loss of the football pitches at the Friends School site.

We willingly provided data on the teams which had used the pitches historically, and the age groups (and therefore pitch size) where our need is most acute, i.e. where the loss of the grass pitches was likely to have the most impact. Chase New Homes produced various helpful layouts indicating two Colts (age U13/U14) 11-a-side pitches, along with a cricket square (i.e. more than just two “strips” for cricket use in between two football pitches which would have limited if any real use). Changing facilities were also included.

Critically, offsite provision was discussed, and this was based around a financial contribution towards the development of a second 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) in Saffron Walden, as well as permanent changing rooms which would serve the SWTC owned Lime Avenue football pitches as well as both Catons Lane and our grass pitches at SWTC owned Anglo American Playing Fields, adjacent to Catons Lane (which we happily share with Saffron Walden Cricket Club).

We felt that if this were all delivered (i.e. two 11-a-side pitches with changing facilities, and a meaningful offsite contribution to a 3G AGP and changing rooms somewhere else in Saffron Walden), it would adequately compensate for the permanent loss of the more extensive Friends School pitches.

However, in December 2023, discussions with Chase New Homes were abruptly terminated by the Developer, and it became apparent that they would pursue an application for residential development of the site without including any offsite contribution at all. It was even more disappointing to see the application which was later submitted without taking into account at all our specific wishes for the size of the retained facilities at the Friends site, which had been discussed extensively with the Applicant. The application that is now under consideration shows a football layout that is of limited use and disregards all the advice that we had freely given about the actual “need”.

Whilst the changing facilities might appear to be impressive, the 11-a-side and 9-a-side pitches are of limited value, and the overall loss of grass football pitch space has a very significant impact of Youth and Adult football in Saffron Walden. What we require is two 11-a-side pitches (which can also be used with smaller 9v9 pitches marked inside), plus a sensible offsite contribution towards permanent changing facilities at Lime Avenue so that those pitches can be properly used, and also a financial contribution towards a second 3G AGP elsewhere in Saffron Walden.

In summary:

- This development would, if consented, result in the permanent loss of the best “football” asset in our Town.
- The population of the Town continues to grow but facilities have declined. This cannot continue.
- The proposed two pitches retained are too small and need to be 11-v11.
- We will leave the Cricket Club to comment on whether having just two wickets squeezed in between two football pitches is of any value at all for cricket.
- Our Football Club cannot expand to meet the demands of the growing population without MORE facilities, and this creates LESS.
- Offsite contribution towards changing facilities at Catons Lane/Lime Avenue, and contribution towards a second 3G AGP in Saffron Walden, is absolutely vital.

I would be happy to meet to discuss in more detail our concerns about the impact of this loss of grass sports pitches in Saffron Walden, and our needs for their replacement, if the scheme is to be consented.

**Matthew Clare**

Club Secretary

Saffron Walden Community FC

