

3/08/2090/FP - Single storey link extension. First floor extension over the existing ground floor changing room and gym area and two external metal escape stairs at Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre, Bishop's Stortford for Sports & Leisure Management Ltd

Date of Receipt: 12.12.08

Type: Full

Parish: BISHOP'S STORTFORD

Ward: BISHOP'S STORTFORD- MEADS

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:-

1. Three Year Time Limit (1T12)
2. Programme of archaeological work (2E03)
3. Materials of construction (2E11)
4. Lighting details (2E27)
5. Cycle Parking facilities (2E29)
6. Materials arising from demolition (2E32)
7. Tree retention and protection (4P05)
8. Landscape design proposals (4P12)
9. Landscape works implementation (4P13)
10. Construction hours of working plant and machinery (6N07)
11. Details of any external plant, or external ducts and extractors, including location, design and noise emissions, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of development. There shall be no occupation of any part of the development for its permitted use prior to the implementation of noise abatement measures that have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, such plant and equipment and noise abatement measures shall be retained in accordance with those approved details at all times.

Reason: In the interests of the amenities of nearby residents in accordance with policy ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007), and in particular policies SD1, SD2, SD4, SD5, GBC1, TR1, TR2, TR3, TR4, TR7, TR13, ENV1, ENV2, ENV3, ENV4, ENV11, ENV14, ENV15, ENV16, ENV20, ENV21, ENV23 and ENV24. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies and other material considerations is that permission should be granted.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The application site is shown on the attached OS extract. Grange Paddocks is the Council's leisure centre in Bishop's Stortford. It comprises a swimming pool and small gym, sports pitches, two large surface car parks and ancillary facilities. The site is accessed by vehicles over the River Stort from Rye Street.
- 1.2 The site lies within a green finger, an area of open land extending northwards from the town centre, bounded by the railway line to the east and Rye Street to the west, which is designated Green Belt. To the north and south the land is generally open, with intervening tree planting. Residential properties lie to the west of the car parks and are separated from the site by the access road and River Stort. To the east, beyond the playing fields and the railway line are more residential properties.
- 1.3 The main building which is some 1200 square metres in floor area, is a brick built flat roofed structure with significant expanses of glazing. The part of the building accommodating the swimming pool is double storey in height whilst the remaining part, which accommodates the reception area, gym and changing facilities, is single storey in height. Some 8 metres to the north of the main building is a small detached single story building which accommodates the outdoor changing facilities for the sports pitches.
- 1.4 The current application proposes a first floor flat roofed extension over the existing reception area and changing rooms to accommodate a new 507 square metre gym and a single storey flat roofed extension some 136 square metres in size on the northern elevation of the main building which will accommodate a new studio. This extension will fill in the gap between

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the two existing buildings on the site. The flat roofs of both elements which may need to house plant will be, in part, screened by parapet walls.

- 1.5 The existing gym will be converted into a second smaller studio and the changing facilities will be refurbished. A new circulation route is also proposed around the northern side of the outdoor changing building to provide pedestrian access to the sports pitches. No alterations are proposed to the existing parking provision.
- 1.6 The application is accompanied by a Design Statement, a Flood Risk statement and a Geotechnical Desk Top Study Report.

2.0 Site History

- 2.1 Outline planning permission was granted in 2002 under LPA Ref: 3/01/2284/OP for the erection of an extension to the existing pool and gym building along with additional car parking. This scheme has not been implemented.

3.0 Consultation Responses

- 3.1 The County Archaeologist advises that the site lies within an Area of Archaeological Significance and is rich with archaeological deposits from the Roman period. Accordingly it is recommended that there is a reasonable likelihood of significant archaeological remains being present and therefore an appropriately worded condition should be included on any planning permission requiring a scheme of investigation to take place.
- 3.2 The County Development Unit advises that Waste Policies 3, 7 and 8 are relevant to the determination of the application and regard must be had to the promotion of sustainable management of waste and the potential for minimising any waste generated by the development.

4.0 Town Council Representations

- 4.1 No comments have been received from Bishop's Stortford Town Council.

5.0 Other Representations

- 5.1 The application has been advertised by way of individual neighbour notification. To date, no third party letters of representation have been received.

6.0 Policy

6.1 The Policies of the adopted East Herts Local Plan that are most relevant to the consideration of this application are as follows:

SD1	Making Development More Sustainable
SD2	Settlement Hierarchy
GBC1	Appropriate Development in the Green Belt
TR7	Car Parking- Standards
TR13	Cycling –Facilities Provision (Non- Residential)
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV3	Planning Out Crime- New Development
ENV4	Access for Disabled People
ENV19	Development in Areas Liable to Flood
BH1	Archaeology & New Development
BH2	Archaeological Evaluations and Assessments
BH3	Archaeological Conditions and Agreements
LRC2	Joint Provision and Dual Use

7.0 Considerations

7.1 The main issue for consideration is whether the principle of the development on the site is acceptable. Consideration also needs to be given to any impact the development may have on the amenities of nearby residents; the design, scale and siting of the extensions; landscaping; parking; flooding and archaeological issues

Principle of development

7.2 Within the Green Belt under the provisions of Local Plan Policy GBC1, permission will not normally be given for the construction of new buildings or changes of use, other than for those purposes listed under the policy as appropriate development. The proposal fails to fall within any of these exception categories and so constitutes “inappropriate” development and consequently it needs to be considered whether there are any very special circumstances in this case to warrant a decision that overrides Green Belt policy.

7.3 It was accepted in 2002 that very special circumstances existed to allow a departure from the then Local Plan and outline planning permission granted for extensions to the leisure centre as set out in section 2 above. This is a material consideration when considering the current proposal. It therefore needs to be determined whether or not these very special circumstances

still exist. In addition, as new Regional and Local Plans have been adopted since the previous applications, it is important that the full requirements of these are taken into consideration, although it is noted that Green Belt policies have remained largely unchanged.

- 7.4 The very special circumstances put forward by the applicant are that the current facility is dated and does not comply with current DDA legislation (for a new building). The proposed works will bring the centre in line with the expectations and needs of a modern leisure centre and allow a wider community to benefit from the facilities (i.e. disabled groups and over 50's). This would have significant health and well being benefits for the residents in East Herts. They also argue that the proposal would result in a significant improvement to the appearance of the centre and they stress that particular consideration was given to the design of the proposed extension in order to minimize its impact on the surrounding area.
- 7.5 Officers are satisfied, in this case, that the substantial benefits to the local community that would arise from this sports and recreation development constitute very special circumstances that would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm. The principle of the development is therefore considered to be acceptable.

Neighbour amenity

- 7.6 Turning to any impact the proposal may have on the amenities of neighbouring properties, the nearest neighbour to the proposed development is no. 9b Stane Close some 70 metres away. Windows have been carefully positioned to face away from nearby properties at first floor level and I do not consider that the proposal will have a harmful effect on their living conditions. Furthermore, I do not consider that the level of activity generated by the extended facilities will significantly increase over and above that which already exists at the site. The distance to the properties and the existing tree screening along the River Stort will ensure that the buildings impact will remain at a visually acceptable level.

Design, scale and siting

- 7.7 Turning to the acceptability of the design and scale of the extensions, I consider that the extensions proposed have been designed to complement and enhance the existing building and are appropriate in both their design and size. Furthermore, the proposed siting of the new extensions which utilises space between the two existing buildings as well as above the existing storey part of the building, minimises the amount of new footprint required and therefore is also appropriate.

Landscaping

- 7.8 The scheme proposes the removal of one tree, a Sycamore, which is sited in front of the existing building. Whilst its removal is not necessary to accommodate the new extension, its loss is proposed to open up the front elevation and improve natural light. Furthermore there is growing concern that its close proximity to the existing building could lead to damage to its foundations and the nearby drainage system. Whilst the tree is of amenity value it is not formally protected and whilst the Council would always prefer to see existing trees retained, it is considered that in this case, there are grounds to allow its removal.

Parking

- 7.9 There are currently 174 car parking spaces serving all the facilities at Grange Paddocks which falls below the current parking standards as set out in the Local Plan. The Local Plan requires that a maximum of 42 car parking spaces should be provided for the new extensions, however no additional parking is proposed.
- 7.10 Notwithstanding this, it is my view that the existing level of parking at the site is more than adequate to accommodate the needs of the extended facilities from Monday to Friday, when the sports pitches are rarely in use. Parking problems do occur at the weekends, but this appears to be related to the use of the adjoining sports pitches and not the actual centre itself.
- 7.11 Officers do not consider that the provision of extra spaces at the site would alleviate these current problems. Additional spaces are not needed for the new extended facilities during the week, but would then tend to be consumed by the users of the pitches at the weekends, and may indeed encourage additional car usage at those times. The current parking conflicts would therefore remain. I therefore consider that the most appropriate solution to the current problems would be through the parking management of the site. Indeed, the applicants have confirmed that a number of measures are being considered to improve the car park management and to ensure that sufficient parking is available for the new extended facilities at the weekend, in front of the building itself. Officers therefore consider that in this case the level of parking already available at the site is acceptable for the extended facility.

Flooding

- 7.12 The site lies in close proximity to the River Stort and falls within Flood Zone 2. In line with the Environment Agency's current flood risk standing advice, the applicant has submitted a statement confirming that floor levels within

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the proposed development will be set no lower than the existing levels and a number of flood resilience and resistance techniques have been proposed. The Environment Agency has not raised any objections to this approach and accordingly I consider that the proposal would not result in an increase in flood risk and is in line with Policy ENV19 of the Local Plan.

Archaeology

- 7.13 The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Significance and the County Archaeologist has advised that when investigations were carried out in 1978 and 2001 evidence of Roman Activity was discovered. It is therefore considered that there is a reasonable likelihood of significant archaeological remains being present at the site and therefore I have recommended a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 Having regard to the above considerations it is considered that very special circumstances exist in this case to warrant a departure from the Local Plan. It is therefore recommended that, subject to the conditions set out at the head of this report, planning permission should be granted.
- 8.2 In light of the previous decision it is not considered necessary for this application to be referred to the Secretary of State.