

3/09/0002/FP – Erection of flood lit all weather pitch at the Plateau Pitch, Cricketfield Lane, Bishops Stortford for Bishop’s Stortford Hockey Club.

Date of Receipt: 19.01.09

Type: Full Permission

Parish: BISHOP’S STORTFORD

Ward: BISHOP’S STORTFORD SILVERLEYS

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reasons:-

1. R0212 – Within MGB – EHLP
2. The proposed development, by reason of its size, extent of hard surfacing, the height and amount of fencing and the height and number of floodlight columns would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the site and the openness of the Green Belt, contrary to policies GBC1 and ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan second Review April 2007.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The application site is located on the northern edge of the settlement of Bishop’s Stortford as shown on the attached OS extract.
- 1.2 The application site is a large area of open recreational land, situated adjacent to Barrells Down Road to the east, woodland and allotment gardens to the north and a playground and tennis courts to the south. The application site slopes downwards in a westerly direction and south of the site are a number of sports and recreational facilities with associated outbuildings, including tennis courts and a large cricket ground, which are situated adjacent to Cricketfield Lane.
- 1.3 This application seeks permission for the erection of a flood lit all weather pitch. The pitch and access path around the pitch is proposed to be some 101 metres long and some 63 metres wide. The pitch is proposed to be enclosed by weldmesh fencing of 3 metres high, which rises to 4.5metres high for a length of 21 metres behind each goal. The application also proposes the erection of 8 floodlighting columns each reaching a height of approximately 14 metres high. The application does not propose any parking or changing facilities.

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- 1.4 The proposed flood lit all weather pitch would be for the use of Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club (BSHC). The Hockey Club previously played all their league matches at the site of the proposed Plateau Pitch however, they now play all their matches at Hockerill School in Dunmow Road as it is a league requirement to play matches on astroturf pitches. BSHC currently make use of changing and social facilities located along Cricketfield Lane and the proposed pitch would enable them to use these for post-match refreshments without the need of travelling from Hockerill School.
- 1.5 The application indicates that BSHC are seeking a new site for league games as Hockerill School wish to make their school site more secure by removing the majority of hockey games from the all weather pitch. It is considered that this would reduce the number of strangers on the site and enable Hockerill School to enhance their security.
- 1.6 The application site is designated in the Local Plan as within the Metropolitan Green Belt (Policy GBC1) and as an existing playing field/ open space/ recreation area (Policy LRC1).

2.0 Site History

- 2.1 There is no relevant planning history relating to the application site.
- 2.2 At the former Whitehall College site to the north of the Plateau Pitch, planning permission was recently granted for the renovation and change of use of Whitehall House to one dwelling, demolition of Venn House dormitory block, theatre block and offices, renovation and extension of 4 cottages, one replacement dwelling and the construction of 6 new dwellings with leveling, surfacing and seeding of the southern field to provide junior cricket club facilities (LPA Ref: 3/08/1160/FP).
- 2.3 A number of sporting facilities along Cricketfield Lane have previously been granted planning permission including a replacement cricket pavilion in (LPA Ref: 3/98/1257/FP) and new tennis courts with lighting, access road and parking with a new tennis pavilion (LPA Ref: 3/97/0411/FP). Since then development associated with these tennis courts has been granted planning approval, which most recently includes the removal of the existing hut and shed, and construction of a new pavilion for tennis club use for viewing and shelter (LPA Ref: 3/07/3331/FP).

3.0 Consultation Responses

- 3.1 County Highways have commented that the proposed scheme is not significant in terms of traffic generation and may result in a reduction in overall traffic movements by concentrating hockey related activities to a single venue. They do not wish to restrict the grant of planning permission and have recommended a condition ensuring that the source of illumination should be screened from the highway in accordance with details to be agreed with the planning authority, and such screening shall thereafter be maintained to the authority's satisfaction.
- 3.2 Environmental Health have commented that the grant of planning permission should be subject to conditions including a restriction on the construction of hours working (plant & machinery), requirement for lighting details to be agreed by the Local Planning Authority, no external loudspeakers and hours of operation to be restricted.
- 3.3 The Council's Landscape Officer has commented that there does not appear to be any significant impact on existing trees. However, there are some existing trees in the immediate vicinity of the site which are not shown on the submitted plans. There is no objection in principle to the proposed development however, conditions requiring a tree survey and tree planting would be recommended to ensure the trees closest to the development would not be adversely affected by any construction works.
- 3.4 The Campaign to Protect Rural England – The Hertfordshire Society have commented that the site is located within the Green Belt adjoining a designated Wildlife Site which has considerable amenity value as a green open space. They believe the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the natural environment and local amenity.

4.0 Town Council Representations

- 4.1 Bishop's Stortford Town Council objects to the proposed development as the proposal was considered an inappropriate development in the Green Belt and detrimental to the open aspect of the area. Noise and light pollution generated by the floodlights and the evening matches would be detrimental to residents and contrary to GBC1, ENV23 and ENV24 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review. The proposal would generate traffic and car parking issues for local residents. They have commented that should the Council be minded to approve the application that strict conditions concerning the timings of the floodlighting, similar to those imposed on the Tennis Club be implemented.

5.0 Other Representations

- 5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.
- 5.2 There have been 75 letters of objection received. The main issues raised are as follows:
- Loss open space and recreational amenity area for local residents.
 - Detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the rural area.
 - Increase congestion and parking levels in surrounding residential areas.
 - Light and noise pollution would have an intrusive and detrimental impact on local residents and wildlife.
 - Inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
 - Impact upon drainage and possible flood risk
- 5.3 There have been 32 letters of support received, The main issues raised are as follows:
- Beneficial to the wider local community of Bishops Stortford and surrounding areas.
 - Proposed development would meet a current deficiency in sports facilities within Bishops Stortford.
- 5.4 Bishop's Stortford Sports Trust have commented that they support the proposed development and consider it vital to the future wellbeing of Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club. In addition to the existing sports and recreational facilities in the vicinity the proposed all weather pitch would secure the area as a sports base for town centre residents.
- 5.5 Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club have commented that the need for an all weather pitch close to their existing facilities is critical as the Hockey Club is unable to fulfill all fixtures on the pitch currently available to them at Hockerill School and have needed to hire additional pitch space at Bishop's Stortford College. They have also commented that access and parking at Hockerill School has become more restricted in light of security problems at the school, particularly as teaching occurs on Saturdays.

6.0 Policy

- 6.1 The relevant policies of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) are:

GBC1	Appropriate Development in the Green Belt
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV23	Light Pollution and Floodlighting
LRC1	Sport and Recreational Facilities

7.0 Considerations

7.1 The determining issues in relation to this application are:

- The principle of development within the Metropolitan Green Belt and on land identified for sport recreation purposes;
- The impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area;
- The impact of the proposed development on the amenities of local residents;
- Highway/ Access considerations.

Principle of Development

7.2 The application site is designated as within the Metropolitan Green Belt in the Local Plan, wherein development will be inappropriate unless it is for purposes specified within the policy, which includes essential small scale facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.

7.3 The proposed floodlit all weather pitch, which would be approximately 6300 square metres, in area, would represent a substantial development within the Green Belt which in Officers opinion could not reasonably be considered small scale in terms of sporting facilities. The proposed floodlit all weather pitch would represent a departure from Policy GBC1 in that respect and would therefore be considered to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

7.4 Policy GBC1 states that planning permission will not be given for inappropriate development within the Green Belt, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated that clearly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness or any other harm.

7.5 It has been indicated that Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club (BSHC) require a new site for their league matches as this would enable the club to make more efficient use of the changing rooms and social facilities located along Cricketfield Lane, where their matches were previously played.

- 7.6 All league matches are required to be played on all weather pitches. However, it has been indicated that Hockerill School, where the majority of matches are currently played, wish to make their site more secure by removing the majority of BSHC's games from the Hockerill School pitch in order to reduce the number of strangers on the site and enable the school to enhance their security. It is acknowledged that locating the proposed pitch closer to the BSHC changing and social facilities would make their use more convenient however; it is considered that these considerations would not outweigh the harm caused by the size and scale of the proposed development. Accordingly, it is considered that very special circumstances do not exist in this case, and the proposed development is considered to be contrary to policy GBC1 of the Local Plan.
- 7.7 The site is also designated as a sport and recreation facility within the Local Plan (Policy LRC1). It would appear that the site is currently used for informal sport and recreation. If the principle of the use of the site as a hockey pitch were to be considered acceptable, the site would remain as a sport and recreation facility and would accord with policy LRC1 of the Local Plan. Although the PPG17 Audit and Assessment of open space, indoor sport and recreational facilities identified that there was a lack of playing pitches within Bishop's Stortford, I do not consider that the need for such pitches would in this instance outweigh the harm caused by the proposed development.

Impact of the Proposed Development on the Character and Appearance of the Area

- 7.8 The flood lit all weather pitch is proposed to be situated on an area of open recreational land. This land is currently grassed and land levels vary across the site. There are a number of mature trees on the boundaries of this area of land and also some located within the site itself. The site has a rural appearance and character. The proposed pitch would result in the introduction of a large expanse of hard surfacing into this area, and together with the proposed fencing and floodlights would result in a significant change to the character and appearance of the site. Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposed development would be partially screened from the surrounding residential areas by the existing landscaping along the edge of the site, it is considered that the large area of proposed hardstanding and the high perimeter fences and floodlights would appear unduly prominent and intrude into the openness of the Green Belt which would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, contrary to policies GBC1, ENV1 and ENV23 of the Local Plan.

Impact of the Proposed Development on the Amenities of Local Residents

- 7.9 The application proposes to site 8no. floodlighting columns outside of the perimeter fence in order to allow the pitch to be used throughout the winter months for evening and weekend matches. It is acknowledged that the proposed floodlights would be located over 50 metres from the nearest residential property, reducing any potential impact on their general amenity. The application was accompanied by a floodlight spillage levels plan, which indicates that the floodlight spillage would not impact directly upon surrounding residential properties. Whilst it is acknowledged that the outlook from properties in Barrells Down Road and Cricketfield Lane will be impacted upon when the floodlights are in operation in comparison to their current outlook, officers do not consider that this impact would be so detrimental to warrant a refusal of the application. It is also considered that if the pitch and floodlighting were considered to be acceptable in principle, the impact of the proposed floodlighting could be limited via condition, which could limit the hours of operation of the proposed floodlighting and restrict the hours of use of the proposed pitch.
- 7.10 The proposed hockey pitch would result in a change in the character of the use of the land. The use of the land for formal recreation will intensify the use of the land, and this increased use may be at times when the land is now not currently used i.e. evening use. Although there will be a change to the character of the use, officers do not consider that this would result in a detrimental impact on the amenities of local residents. The use of the site is also restricted by the fact that permission is being sought for only one pitch, and this will obviously limit the amount the site can be used. It should be noted that the site could be used for formal recreation purposes (if no development is required to facilitate such uses), such as football matches, without the need for planning permission.

Highways/ Access Considerations

- 7.11 The proposed development is likely to increase the number of people visiting the site and may increase the number of vehicle movements into and out of the site. However, County Highways have commented that the proposed scheme is not significant in terms of traffic generation and it is therefore considered that although traffic movements may increase, this would not be significant in terms of its impact on the surrounding residential area. It is acknowledged that access into and out of the site has not been detailed however, this is something that could be agreed by condition if the principle of development were considered to be acceptable.

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7.12 The application does not propose the provision of any car parking in association with the approved use. As identified above, the proposed use of the site would result in more people using the site than currently do, and it is likely that many of these people will arrive by car. Clearly without the provision of on-site parking this will lead to an increase in on-street parking. Whilst such on-street parking would be in addition to that which currently occurs particularly on Barrells Down Road, Officers do not consider that the increase in parking would be so significant as to warrant refusal of the application.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Having regard to the above considerations it is concluded that the proposed development would represent inappropriate development within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and it is considered that very special circumstances do not exist in this instance to warrant a departure from policy. The proposed development by reason of its size and the extent and amount of hard surfacing, fencing and floodlighting columns would result in a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the site and openness of the Green Belt contrary to policies GBC1, ENV1 and ENV23 of the Local Plan.

8.2 It is therefore recommended that planning permission be refused for the reasons outlined at the head of this report.