

**3/09/0352/FP – Change of use of 1 hectare of Field 2769 from agricultural to recreational use for a football pitch and car parking at Hare Street, SG9 0AE for Hormead Hares F.C.**

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**Date of Receipt:** 09.03.2009

**Type:** Full

**Parish:** HORMEAD

**Ward:** BRAUGHING

**Reason for report:** Major application

**RECOMMENDATION**

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

1. The application site lies within the Rural Area as defined in the East Herts Local Plan where development will only be allowed for certain specific purposes. There is insufficient justification for the proposed development and it would result in an inappropriate and unsustainable form of development in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. It would therefore be contrary to policies GBC3, SD1 and SD2 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.
2. The proposed development by reason of its size, siting and appearance and would be out of keeping with and detrimental to the character and appearance of the Rural Area contrary to Policies GBC3, GBC14 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 situated to the east of Hare Street, adjacent to the River Quin, as shown on the attached Ordnance Survey extract.
- 1.2 The site is approximately 1 hectare in size and currently forms part of a larger field used for arable farming purposes. It is bounded to the west by the River Quin and to the north by the B1038. To the south and east it is open with the rest of the field. On the opposite side of the River Quin are the Meads playing fields, a small pavilion, car park and 2 further football pitches used by the club. The majority of the site is flat; however the land gently rises up to towards the east.

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1.3 This application seeks permission to change the use of part of the field from its present agricultural use to a sports field to be used by Hormead Hares FC, a children's football club. The proposal involves the creation of a football pitch, a new vehicular access from the B1038 and a surface car park for 93 vehicles constructed of 'Grid Force' ground covering.

1.4 Supporting information provided by the applicant states that:

*'Hormead Hares Football Club operates in an area of rural isolation where there is no sport for children in many of the surrounding villages. Some 78% of the children live within 4.5 miles of the site.*

*Hormead Hares FC requires an additional junior 11 a side football pitch as we have now reached full capacity for junior players i.e. from 5 to 18 years for both boys and girls. When players attain the age of 15 it is an FA requirement that they play using full size goals, we currently only have one pitch that reaches this requirement and in season 2009/10 will have up to 6 teams over 15 years...*

*Part of the proposed development has overhead cables crossing it and an underground sewer running through it. This would give us an opportunity to create a car park and get parked cars off the B1038 which was one of the concerns of local residents...'*

1.5 The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment, a Planning Statement and several supporting letters, including one from the local MP.

## **2.0 Site History**

2.1 Planning permission was granted in 2006 (3/06/0430/FP) for the change the use of Field 2129, which is sited to the south west of the application site on the opposite side of the River Quin, from agricultural use to a sports field to be used by Hormead Hares FC. The proposal involved the creation of two football pitches with a pedestrian access from The Meads through an existing gap in the hedge.

## **3.0 Consultation Responses**

3.1 County Highways comments that the site is linked to the other pitches by a continuous footway along the public highway. Whilst the access is not shown in detail it is considered that an appropriate access having sufficient driver visibility is capable of being provided. Therefore they do not wish to restrict the grant of permission subject to the inclusion of conditions regarding the details of the junction/ access, the hardsurfacing of the

access and parking areas and space within the site for the parking and storage of materials being provided during construction.

- 3.2 The Environment Agency comments that they have had extensive pre-application talks with the applicant regarding this site and all their recommendations have been implemented. They therefore have no objections to the proposals.

#### **4.0 Parish Council Representations**

- 4.1 Hormead Parish Council comments that it supports Hormead Hares Football Club in its present format, but considers that any further growth will be detrimental to the parish. It therefore objects for the following reasons:

- The club is already more than adequate in size for the parish. Its expansion will only encourage more members from further a field where there are already existing football teams available;
- The provision of any additional pitches will exceed the capacity of the current pavilion leading to pressure for additional facilities;
- The site lies within the Rural Area and there is no justification for additional football pitches in the parish where there are already 6 available;
- Adverse environmental impact on the biodiversity of the area;
- There is adequate parking available at the Meads and on land already leased by the club in Hare Street. The additional car parking is only required because the club wish to expand into a major football club which would be out of keeping with the rural character of the area;
- The requirements of the football club could be accommodated by rearranging the existing recreational land to provide a further full size pitch plus training areas;
- Increase in traffic;
- The proposal does not benefit the residents of Hare Street; only 15 of the 260 Football Club members are residents of the village;
- The football club already use other pitches in Nuthampstead, Braughing and Buntingford and therefore does not need more pitches.

#### **5.0 Other Representations**

- 5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

- 5.2 3 letters of representation have been received which can be summarised as follows:-

- The club has outgrown the village;

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- The extra pitch and car park will result in additional traffic and congestion;
- The existing pitches cause congestion, noise and pollution; this proposal will exacerbate the problems;
- Most members of the club come from urban areas where the facility should be based.

## **6.0 Policy**

6.1 The East Herts Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) policies relevant to the consideration of this application are:

SD2	Settlement Hierarchy
GBC2	The Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt
GBC3	Appropriate Development in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt
GBC12	Agricultural Land
GBC14	Landscape Character
TR2	Access to New Developments
TR4	Travel Plans
TR7	Car Parking- Standards
TR13	Cycling- Facilities provision (Non- Residential)
TR20	Development Generating Traffic on Rural Roads
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV18	Water Environment
ENV19	Development in Area Liable to Flood

## **7.0 Considerations**

7.1 The site lies within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. The main determining issues in this case therefore relate to whether the proposal is appropriate within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, where the aims and objectives of policy are placed firmly on growth restraint; the issue of sustainability; and whether the development would be acceptable in respect of traffic generation and highway safety. Consideration also needs to be given to the appearance of the proposed development and any the impact it will have upon the rural appearance of land and the amenities of any nearby properties.

### **Principle of development**

7.2 Within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, under the provisions of Local Plan Policy GBC3, 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. I consider that given the extensive facilities for recreation already available in Hare Street and the

size of the car park proposed, which will accommodate some 90 vehicles, the proposal does not constitute an essential “small scale” facility for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, nor does it fall within any of the other exception categories. The proposal therefore constitutes “inappropriate” development and consequently it needs to be considered whether there is sufficient justification in this case to warrant a departure from normal Rural Area policy.

- 7.3 Turning first to the football pitch; in the accompanying planning statement the applicant states that this is required due to the increased size of the club and because the existing pitches are insufficient in size to accommodate the older age groups. I do not consider the arguments put forward constitute special circumstances to justify departing from Policy GBC3. Whilst I acknowledge that the Council generally supports the provision of sports clubs such as Hornead Hares, no information has been provided regarding why the club needs to operate from one site and why other existing football pitches in other nearby villages and towns could not be used by some of the teams. I therefore consider that there is insufficient justification in this case to warrant a departure from normal Rural Area policy.
- 7.4 With regards to the car park, the applicant states that this is proposed in order to try and alleviate existing problems in the village and provide a permanent solution to parking for the club, which currently rents a number of vacant sites for this purpose in the village. Whilst I acknowledge that such a facility may be desirable, I have received no information regarding the need for a car park of this size nor any evidence from the applicant regarding the existing parking problem. Furthermore, the Council has not received any planning applications in relation to the sites currently being used by club for parking and therefore I do not consider that any possible future development of these sites constitutes a sufficient justification to warrant a departure from normal Rural Area policy with regards to this element of the scheme.
- 7.5 Turning now to the issue of sustainability and accessibility, PPS1 states that sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning, and that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of development. It goes on to state that planning authorities should provide improved access for all leisure and community facilities, open space, sport and recreation, by ensuring that new development is located where everyone can access services or facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car. Policy SD1 of the Local Plan states that applications for proposed developments should explain how development will encourage sustainable movement patterns, and Policy SD2 of the Local Plan seeks to create sustainable patterns of development.

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- 7.6 The application site is located in Hare Street a small village some 2 miles to the east of Buntingford, the nearest town. Whilst the applicant states that some 78% of the members reside within 4.5 miles of the site, public transport to Hare Street is poor and opportunities to walk or cycle are limited. Access to the site will therefore be predominantly reliant on the car.
- 7.7 PPG13 states that a key planning objective is to ensure that jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling, and PPG17 states that when identifying where to locate new areas of sports and recreational facilities, local authorities should promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport. Both PPG13 and PPG17 therefore conclude that from a sustainability point of view, sports and recreational facilities should be located as close as possible to the communities that they are designed to serve. Clearly in this case the location of the site hinders access by public transport, walking and cycling for many of the members of the Club.

#### **Impact upon the rural appearance of the area.**

- 7.8 The Councils adopted Landscape Character Assessment SPD describes the key characteristics of the Quin Valley as its gently sloping sides, its open arable farmland, the fragmented hedges and absence of woodland and mature trees and the extensive views along and across it. It concludes that the landscape character of the Quin Valley should be improved and conserved.
- 7.9 The site is located to the east of the River Quin which forms a natural boundary to the village of Hare Street and its appearance is consistent with that described as being the general character of the valley. The proposed development in contrast would result in a significant incursion into the open countryside, and the proposed car parking would give the site a semi urban appearance which, rather than improving and conserving the existing character, would be out of keeping with and detrimental to the character and appearance of the Rural Area contrary to Policies GBC3, GBC14 and ENV1 of the Local Plan. The proposed development therefore fails in this respect.

#### **Highways matters**

- 7.10 With regards to traffic generation and highway safety, in line with County Highways advice, I am satisfied that that an appropriate access having sufficient driver visibility is capable of being provided in the location proposed and will not prejudice highway safety. Furthermore I do not consider that the provision of one additional football pitch will have a significant impact on traffic generation over and above that already experienced in the village.

**Neighbour Amenity**

- 7.11 In relation to residential amenity, I am satisfied that use of the field for sports and car parking would not unduly impact on nearby residents amenities in terms of noise or disturbance. Whilst there will be some noise created, shouting etc, the field is some 140 metres from the nearest residential property, The Close, and there is significant natural screening along the River between the site and the village.

**8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 Having considered the above matters, it is my opinion that the proposed development is contrary to both National and Local Plan policy. The application site lies within the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt and no special circumstances exist to outweigh the presumption against development in this location.
- 8.2 For these reasons I recommend that planning permission be refused for the reasons set out at the commencement of this report.