

5f 3/12/1463/FP – New sports hall with associated classrooms, changing rooms, fitness suite and storage space at Freman College, Bowling Green Lane, Buntingford, Herts SG9 9BT for Freman College

Date of Receipt: 26.09.2012

Type: Full – Major

Parish: BUNTINGFORD

Ward: BUNTINGFORD

RECOMMENDATION:

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

1. Three Year Time Limit (1T12)
2. Approved Plans (2E10): GA1824-001 A, GA1824-002 A, GA1824-SP01 A, GA1824-SP02 A, GA1824-LP A
3. Samples of materials (2E12)
4. Tree/Hedge Retention and Protection (4P05)
5. Landscape Design Proposals (4P12) (e, i, k, l)
6. Landscape Works Implementation (4P13)
7. Prior to the commencement of the development, details of a scheme to make the sports hall hereby approved available for public and community use, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and the facilities shall thereafter be made available in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: To ensure that dual use is made of educational facilities in accordance with policy LRC2 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

Directive:

1. Other Legislation (01OL)

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 Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD 2012 and the saved policies of the East Herts

Local Plan Second Review April 2007 and in particular policies GBC2, GBC3, GBC4, TR7, ENV1, ENV2, ENV16, LRC1 and LRC2) and the National Planning Policy Framework. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies and the benefits of the scheme is that permission should be granted.

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1.0 Background:

- 1.1 Freman College is located on the northern edge of the settlement of Buntingford and is shown on the attached OS extract. The built up part of the site is allocated in the Local Plan as a Major Developed Site. However, part of the application site, to the north and west of the school buildings is located in the Rural Area beyond the Metropolitan Green Belt and is also designated as land for sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.2 This application proposes the construction of a sports hall building with associated classrooms, changing rooms, fitness suite and storage space. The building is proposed to be constructed on land to the north of the existing school buildings, approximately 7 metres to the north of the Major Developed Site boundary. The area is currently unused and lies to the east of the college's playing fields and pitches.
- 1.3 The proposed building has been designed to accommodate a large sports hall - with a domed roof reaching a maximum height of 10.6 metres to allow headroom for ball games. The roof of the proposed building slopes down to 6 metres in height to provide the required changing facilities, gym suite and storage areas. Internally, a mezzanine floor would provide a viewing gallery as well as four separate classrooms. The proposed building would be square in shape (33.6 metres by 33.2 metres) and would be constructed in a steel frame and clad in coloured tiles.
- 1.4 The sports hall will primarily serve the college's needs but will have provision for other community uses such as after-school clubs and other community and sports groups. The intention is to make the hall and its facilities available to the local community, for leisure facilities and clubs.

2.0 Site History:

- 2.1 The site has an extensive planning history, including the provision of various extensions and a number of mobile classrooms but none relevant to the consideration of this application.

3.0 Consultation Responses:

- 3.1 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre conclude that there are no known ecological constraints regarding the proposed development and the application should be determined accordingly.
- 3.2 County Highways do not wish to restrict the grant of permission and note that the existing vehicular entrance to the school will remain unchanged. The Highway Authority comments that as the development will not lead to an increase in the number of pupils or staff at the school, the existing parking spaces are considered adequate. In terms of the community use of the proposed building, Highways comment that as the sports centre will be available to the public outside the main peak periods for traffic on the local network, capacity issues are not anticipated.
- 3.3 The Council's Landscape Officer recommends approval subject to a condition for details of a landscape design proposal and tree retention along the northern boundary of the site.
- 3.4 The Council's Environmental Health Unit does not wish to restrict the grant of permission subject to conditions.
- 3.5 Sport England note that the proposal involves the provision of a new sports hall which would be sited on part of the College's grounds adjoining the playing fields. Sport England acknowledge that the proposed sports facility would address the school's existing deficiencies in terms of indoor sports facility provision and would improve the delivery of the PE curriculum. At present the school has a gym built in the 1970s which only has space for 2 badminton courts – a small amount of indoor provision for a school of this size, unlikely to accord with modern standards and expectations. Sport England further comment that the proposed sports building would include a new fitness suite which would widen the range of physical activities available to students and the provision of classrooms on the first floor would allow the academic elements of delivering the PE curriculum to be delivered in close proximity to the facilities. Sport England also acknowledges that the proposed sports hall would be sited on an area of scrubland to the east of the existing playing fields which has not been used for formal sport and would not be capable of being used for playing pitches due to the scrub that exists. In conclusion, Sport England consider that the proposed sports hall benefits the development would offer clearly outweigh the detriment caused by the impact on the playing field. The proposal would thereby meet exceptions E5 and E3 of their playing fields policy. Sport England therefore raise no objection to the proposal.

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3.6 The Environment Agency comment that they have assessed the application and have no concerns with the proposal.

4.0 Town Council Representations:

4.1 Buntingford Town Council do not object to the proposal and comment that although the proposal is contrary to Local Plan Policy, the building represents a valuable community asset.

5.0 Other Representations:

5.1 The application has been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

5.2 No letters of objection have been received. However, 18 letters in support of the application have been received which can be summarised as follows:-

- A long awaited modern facility that will benefit future students;
- The siting of the development has been chosen to have the least impact upon neighbouring properties;
- The size and age of the current sports hall is inadequate for the amount of pupils at the school;
- It will also benefit the community, particularly as there is a desperate need for such facilities in the locality.

6.0 Policy:

6.1 The relevant 'saved' Local Plan policies in this application include the following:

GBC2	The Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt
GBC3	Appropriate Development in the Green Belt
GBC4	Major Developed Sites
TR7	Car Parking Standards
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV16	Protected Species
LRC1	Sport and Recreation Facilities
LRC2	Joint Provision and Dual Use

6.2 In terms of Government Guidance, the National Planning Policy Framework is also a material consideration.

7.0 Considerations:

7.1 The determining issues in relation to this application are as follows:

- The principle of development within the Rural Area;
- The impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Rural Area and the street scene;
- The loss of any existing outdoor sports facilities;
- The impact upon highway safety;
- The impact on neighbour amenity.

Principle of Development

7.2 Freman College is sited within a Major Developed Site, as allocated within the Local Plan. However, the siting of the proposed sports hall and additional classrooms would be located outside of this designated Major Developed Site and within the Rural Area beyond the Metropolitan Green Belt. Within the Rural Area beyond the Metropolitan Green Belt, inappropriate development will not be permitted. Policy GBC3 of the Local Plan lists developments which are classed as appropriate; however this does not include the construction of a sports hall/classrooms within the grounds of a school. It should therefore be considered whether there are material considerations in this case that outweigh the policy presumption against development in the Rural Area.

7.3 In this case, it is important to note the planning statement that has been submitted with this application. This outlines that the proposed sports hall and classrooms would provide much needed facilities for the college and would help to improve the college's physical education curriculum. Freman College currently only has one sports hall (the size of two badminton courts) that has to accommodate 760 pupils. This hall was constructed in the 1970s and is in need of modernising and improving. Furthermore, the proposed four additional classrooms would help to relieve the old and cramped teaching conditions within the small rooms available in the school building and would provide an opportunity for pupils to learn in close proximity to the indoor sports facility.

7.4 In this instance, the letters received in support of the application also form a material consideration. In total, some 18 letters of support have been received from local residents and from those with children attending the college. In summary, the letters of support outline that the existing facilities at the college are inadequate and outdated and that the proposed sports hall is much needed for pupils. Local residents

have also commented that such a facility is needed for the locality and would be a good use for external community groups and clubs. It is the view of Officers that weight should be attached to the support received in favour of the application, as well as the college's need for enhanced educational and sport facilities, which the proposed building would provide.

Loss of existing playing fields

7.5 The proposed sports hall would be sited on land designated for outdoor sports, as allocated within the Local Plan. Policy LRC1 of the Local Plan only permits the loss of school playing fields if alternative facilities are provided that are equivalent to the ones that would be lost. Paragraph 74 of the NPPF advises that playing fields should not be built upon unless the land in question is surplus to need or the loss of the land makes provision for development that makes better or improved sports and recreational facilities in terms of quality and quantity. From the Officer's site visit, it is evident that the proposed sports hall building would be sited on overgrown scrubland that has been unused for some time. It is also important to note that this land is clearly divided from the school's existing playing fields which are sited approximately 40 metres to the south east of the main school building. The proposal would therefore not result in the loss of any existing playing pitches. It is the view of Officers therefore that the proposed sports hall would not result in the loss of any existing playing pitches and would accord with local and national planning policy as it would create an indoor sports facility that would greatly improve both the quality and the quantity of the current facilities available to pupils and to members of the public.

7.6 It is also important in this instance to have regard to the comments received from Sport England, who acknowledge that the proposed sports hall would be sited on area of scrubland that is sited away from the existing playing fields. This area of land has not been used for formal sport for some time and is important to note that it would not be capable of being used for playing pitches due to the scrub that exists. In conclusion, Sport England considers that the sports benefits the proposed development would offer clearly outweigh any detriment. The proposal would thereby meet exceptions E5 and E3 of their playing fields policy.

Size, scale and design

7.7 The proposed building has been designed to be contemporary in appearance, with a vaulted roof, modular steel frame and a mixture of

high tensile fabric with composite panels. Reaching 10.6 metres at its highest point and with a footprint of some 1,196 m², it is acknowledged that the proposed building would be fairly significant in its scale and would represent a large building within the rural area. In this instance, Officers have had regard to the siting of the proposed building – to the north of the site, in close proximity to the boundary which is lined with mature landscaping reaching at least 5 metres in height and away from the public highway and the school entrance. Furthermore, the proposed building has been positioned so that the lower level element of the building that would accommodate the changing facilities and fitness suite would face towards the school, with the larger part of the building sloping away from the school.

- 7.8 Given the simple, contemporary design; the use of high quality materials and the position of the proposed building, Officers are of the view that little harm would be created by the building, its appearance, scale, design, height and siting in terms of its impact on the character of the area or the openness of this rural setting. The building is therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of the requirements of policy ENV1 of the Local Plan and no substantial additional harm is attributed to the proposal in this respect.

Education and Dual Use Sports Provision

- 7.9 Policy LRC2 of the Local Plan states that the Council will promote the joint provision and dual use of educational and leisure facilities. In this instance, the applicant has indicated that the sports hall and associated facilities are to be made available to the community for leisure, sports and community use, both in the evenings and at weekends. The details of this can be secured by a planning condition as recommended.
- 7.10 This opportunity for dual use of the sports hall is considered to be a material consideration of significant weight in favour of the proposal and is supported by Section 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework. This outlines that Local Planning Authorities should aim to promote provision for community uses and facilities that bring residents within a community together and plan positively to achieve the use of shared space, such as meeting places, sports venues, recreational and community driven facilities.
- 7.11 Therefore, the proposed building will enable use during the day for the educational and sports needs of pupils, addressing the lack of provision identified by the college, whilst also creating a building of modern sustainable design with facilities that will enable dual use and shared provision for a wide range of community needs. The proposal therefore

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meets the aims and objectives of Policy LRC2 of the Local Plan, to which significant weight should be attached.

Parking/Highways

- 7.12 The proposed development would not have any impact upon parking provision as the number of children and staff members at the school is not proposed to be increased as a result of the development. The comments received from the Highways Authority also support this. Furthermore, the after hours use of the proposed sports hall for community purposes will be available to the public outside the main peak periods for traffic on the local highway network and outside of school hours. The proposed sports hall would not therefore have any adverse parking or highway implications.

Neighbour Amenity

- 7.13 The proposed building would retain some 200 metres to the nearest neighbouring dwelling (located to the south of the site) and over 35 metres to the industrial units to the east. Officers are therefore of the view that there would be no adverse impact on the privacy, amenity or outlook of neighbouring properties.

Landscape

- 7.14 The Council's Landscape Officer has no objections to the proposed development. The site benefits from established mature landscaping in the form of sycamore and pine trees to the northeast and eastern boundaries. The applicant has indicated that this existing boundary planting is to be retained which compliments the site's rural setting. It is considered that additional landscape opportunities may exist and a condition to this effect is recommended.

8.0 Conclusion:

- 8.1 The proposal represents inappropriate development in the Rural Area beyond the Green Belt. Officers have identified that the proposed building will result in some harm in terms of impact on the character and appearance of the rural area and the loss of a small part of the school's fields. However, the proposed building would have limited visual impact beyond its immediate locality; would not harm the amenity of neighbouring properties or result in any parking or highways problems. Having regard to these considerations, it is Officers view that the benefits of the proposal in terms of the improvements towards physical educational at the college, as well as the provision of dual use

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sports facilities would clearly outweigh any harm identified.

- 8.2 It is therefore considered that there are circumstances in this case to allow permission to be granted contrary to Policy GBC3 of the East Herts Local Plan. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the conditions as outlined out at the head of the report.