

Application No: 13/2082M

Location: BOLLINGTON LEISURE CENTRE, HEATH ROAD, BOLLINGTON, SK10 5EX

Proposal: Replacement of existing football pitch and provision of two new mini football pitches and associated facilities including additional car parking and multi-use games area. Change of use from agricultural land to recreation for part of the area

Applicant: Paul Gibbons, Bollington United Junior Football Club

Expiry Date: 19-Aug-2013

**Date Report Prepared:** 19 July 2013

#### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Approval, subject to conditions.

#### **MAIN ISSUES**

- Principle of Development (*Open Space within the greenbelt*);
- Openness of the Green Belt;
- Landscaping;
- Protection of existing trees;
- Ecology Implications;
- Highways access, serving and parking requirements;
- Public Rights of Way; and
- Amenity Considerations;

#### **REASON FOR REPORT**

This major application is for the redevelopment of Bollington Leisure Centre involving the replacement of existing football pitch, the provision of two new mini football pitches and associated facilities including additional car parking and a multiuse games area. Therefore under the Council's Constitution is required to be determined by the Northern Planning Committee.

Subject to the recommended conditions, the proposal is considered to be acceptable for the reasons set out in the appraisal section of this report.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

Bollington Leisure Centre is situated on the south west outskirts of Bollington off Heath Road and is surrounded by housing to the north, west and east with farmland, mainly pasture to the south. The grounds are divided into two areas, one to the south west of the Leisure Centre with an 11 aside football pitch and children's play area and a larger area to the south east extending to approximately 1.58 Hectares with another 11 aside football pitch.

The south east area is the main focus of the application and is used by Bollington United Junior Football Club (known as the ATAX site). It is serviced by a brick changing facility and has a separate access off Ovenhouse Lane and a tarmac car park for 24 cars. The area is enclosed by mature hedgerows with some trees to the North West and south west boundaries. There is a ditch bounded by a fragmented hedgerow and trees to the north east boundary, which form effective screening and limit views into the site.

The community centre and some single story housing are located adjacent to this boundary but at a lower level. A post and wire fence currently forms the south east boundary of the field with a small triangular field beyond this extending to a mature hedge with trees. This field, part of Modehill Farm has been acquired to allow the football facilities to be improved and extended which is not possible given the constraints of the existing field. The additional land included within the application site is 0.378 Hectares and is unlevel rough pasture with a slope of between 1:15 and 1:30 towards a low area. The rest of the field extends eastwards towards South West Avenue and this area is to remain as grazing land and is not included in the application site.

The area to the south west of the Leisure Centre slopes gently to the south west towards a badly drained area and the existing football pitch is in need of drainage and surface improvements. The rear properties of Princess Drive and Bollington abut the northern and western boundaries. There is an existing children's play area set into a bank to the rear of Princess Drive enclosed by fencing and this has recently been improved with some new equipment added. The south east boundary is formed by a dense thorn hedge with some Council owned allotments beyond this.

## **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

The Football Club wish to provide a greater variety of pitch sizes to allow more flexibility and increase usage. The applicant has stated that various development options and pitch layouts were examined and the final proposals were firmed up following a feasibility study by the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) and community consultation. These also took into account an arboricultural survey and an 11kv electrical cable which crosses the site.

### **New Football Pitches:**

The proposal is to create a new 11 aside pitch (90 x 55m) to replace the old one and two mini soccer pitches (47 x 27.5m). These will be sited on one graded platform falling 1:150 from east to west. Cut and fill will be balanced out with gentle grading to banks (maximum 1:3) to minimise any landscape or visual impact and ensure no detrimental effect on the mature trees within the boundary hedgerows. A herringbone drainage system will drain the pitches into soakaways to be located in the North West corner.

The existing car park is to have a small extension for 5 spaces with an overflow car park which will provide for a further 23 spaces.

### **Teen Play Area:**

A small Teen Play area with a steel shelter is located close to the car park fairly close to the access. The play area will consist of a play activity unit of steel construction to cater for children up to 14 years old providing a variety of challenging hanging and climbing activities with a maximum height of 2.8m. Three Sheffield type steel cycle racks are also proposed near the play area.

### **Multi-use Games Area:**

A Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) 20 x 30m in size is located on level ground between the play area and main pitch areas with a tarmac surface with concrete edgings. It will be enclosed with steel mesh fencing 3m high, dark green powder coated with separate pedestrian and vehicular access gates. It will be floodlit by four 8m high pale grey steel columns. The MUGA would have a porous surface and would be drained into a soakaway. The applicant has stated that the MUGA will be available for general use within but may be locked at night by Leisure Centre staff.

### **Wildlife Garden:**

The proposals to the area west of the Leisure Centre include a bound gravel surface with a timber edge to the existing public footpaths with a link to the existing allotments. Some additional tree groups are also proposed. A small wildlife garden/wetland area is also proposed in the southern corner with some timber seating and a small area of timber decking. The applicant has stated that they hope this area can be developed through community involvement with the planting

## **RELEVANT HISTORY**

Following a review of the Council's records the following planning history on the site is considered relevant:-

- Originally change of use of the site to leisure pursuits was approved in July 1982, under reference 30587P;
- Planning Permission was approved in January 1990 for temporary changing facilities for Bollington United Junior F.C, under reference 61734P;
- Planning Permission was then approved in January 1995 for the retention of the temporary changing facilities, under reference 80085P; and
- Full planning permission was granted for a permanent two-story club house in April 2002, under reference 02/0446P.

The following Planning History on the Leisure Centre site is also considered relevant: -

- Full planning permission was granted in 28 January 2013 for erection of a two-storey rear extension to the Leisure Centre to provide a fitness suite, in addition, a new lift, chiller store and 6 new car parking spaces are proposed, under reference 10/4713M. The proposed rear extension was on the footprint of consent 04/0881P and was similar in terms of scale.

## **POLICIES**

By virtue of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Development Plan for Cheshire East currently comprises the saved policies from the Congleton Borough (January 2005), Crewe and Nantwich (February 2005) and Macclesfield Local Plan (January 2004).

### **North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021:**

Please note that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has revoked the North West Regional Strategy on the 20 May 2013. Therefore this document no longer forms part of the Development Plan.

### **Local Plan Policy:**

The application site falls within the Green Belt, and is designated as a Playing Field within the MBC Local Plan (2004). There is a Public Right of Way through the site. Therefore, the relevant Macclesfield Local Plan Policies are considered to be: -

- Policy GC1: New buildings in the Green Belt;
- Policies BE1 & DC1: Design principles for new developments;
- Policy DC3: Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties;
- Policy DC6: Circulation and access;
- Policy DC8: Landscaping;
- Policy DC9: Tree protection;
- Policy NE11: Nature Conservation;
- Policy RT3 & RT4: Protection/retention of Open Space; and
- Policy T3: Footpaths.

### **Other Material Considerations**

The National Planning Policy Framework came into effect on 27 March 2012, and replaces the advice provided in Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements. The aim of this document is to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, to protect the environment and to promote sustainable growth. Local planning authorities are expected to “plan positively” and that there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Since the NPPF was published, the saved policies within the Macclesfield Borough Council Local Plan are still applicable but should be weighted according to their degree of consistency

with the NPPF. The Local Plan policies outlined above are consistent with the NPPF and therefore should be given full weight.

#### SECTION 8 PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:

Paragraph 73 states *“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities.”*

Paragraph 75 states *“Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.”*

#### SECTION 11 CONSERVING AND ENHANCING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT:

Paragraph 109 states *“The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.”*

#### **CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

**Highways:** No response received.

**Sport England:** No objections.

**Public Rights of Way:** No objection.

**Natural England:** No comments.

**The Environment Agency:** No comments.

**CEC Leisure Services:** Leisure Services have stated that, whilst the overall aims of the Youth Project are admirable, they have raised objections to the current scheme and they believe this application requires amending.

#### **REPRESENTATIONS**

The application has been duly advertised on site by the means of a site notice and neighbouring properties have been written to directly. Notice was also published in the local press.

Four letters of objection have been received from local residents and their objections can be summarised as follows: -

- Contrary to comments no-one at the community session was positive about the plans and all were concerned and strongly opposed the proposals.
- We have been strong supporters of Bollington United for over 20 years but cannot understand the need for the proposed expansion. Bollington already has four football pitches, two by the Leisure Centre, one on the recreation ground and one at Kerridge

Cricket Club. There are also excellent all weather facilities at Tytherington High School close by, which begs the question why there is a need for further pitches in Bollington?

- We strongly object to the installation of floodlights to the proposed multi use games area (MUGA). We would like to know how the lights will be controlled and by whom? We feel that the lights will be intrusive to all the surrounding residents.
- We cannot understand the need for floodlit areas when surrounding facilities are already well equipped.
- There is no mention of what other activities the MUGA will be used for or how this and the play facilities for teenagers will be time restricted, supervised, locked, cleaned or policed.
- The current A-TAX land is frequented by teenagers at present until very late in the evening and sometimes into the early hours of the morning. The proposal will only encourage more unsupervised and anti social activity in the area.
- This proposed area is also close to the bungalows of elderly residents and consideration should be given to their welfare and how the proposal will impact on them. As mentioned above, anti social activity in the area will be increased together with noise late into the evening.
- Contrary to the comments in the Design and Access Statement dated May 2013, the small teen play area and shelter were not endorsed following community consultation, and was strongly opposed.
- At present during the football season parking is a nightmare around the roads leading to the football ground and this relates to only one football pitch at present. The situation will only get worse if the proposal goes ahead and will cause more problems to the surrounding areas. The Leisure Centre car park is always full during the weekend and so cannot be used as an overflow car park.
- We feel that the existing area, within the existing boundary fence, could be further developed to provide excellent facilities for the football club without the need for floodlights, MUGA and teen shelter
- The current pitches are already abused by miniature motor cycles etc racing over the pitch and there is never anyone there when these incidents occur. It will only get worse.

## **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The planning application was accompanied by the following supporting information listed below: -

- Design and Access Statement;
- Planning Statement;
- Consultation Summary 2009;
- Traffic Statement and 2013 update;
- Badger Survey 2010 and 2013 update; and
- Tree Survey and Arboricultural Implication Study 2010.

All of these reports can be views on the electronic file on the Council's Website.

## **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

**Principle of Development: (open space within the Green Belt):**

The application site is existing open space within the greenbelt. National Planning Policy Framework and GC1 of the Macclesfield Local Plan allow essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, which preserve the openness of the green belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it.

Policy RT1 in The Local Plan identifies those areas of recreational land and open space which it is intended will be protected from other forms of development.

Redevelopment schemes present opportunities for creating new areas of open space which can add variety and enhance the local urban environment. This site would also be accessible to a large number of people. The Borough Council should aim to take advantage of any such opportunities which arise.

The scheme has the support of Sport England as although the proposals would require the re-orientation of the existing pitches, the scheme would have the obvious and overriding sporting benefit by enlarging the playing field land available as well as the provision of a MUGA and associate parking.

### **Openness of the Green Belt:**

It is considered that the proposed redevelopment of the site will have an effect on the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt. Although no new buildings are proposed, the scheme includes other structures, such as lighting columns. Fences, goal posts associated with formal playing pitches.

Whilst the scheme will arguably reduce openness to some extent, having regard to their minimal scale, these can be considered to be an essential facility for this type of outdoor sport and are considered to be acceptable within the Green Belt.

### **Management and Maintenance Issues:**

Whilst officers of the Council have been involved at various stages over the past years and have been influential in bringing improvements in the area forward, no recent consultation has taken place with the Council's Estate or Leisure Services Departments and they have stated that they were unaware that a planning application was being prepared and submitted. Members should note that pre app discussion took place in 2009 and at that point the Planning department advised the applicant to discuss the proposal with Leisure Officers.

There are works proposed for the playing field to the left of Leisure Centre, known as Bollington Cross pitch, including the proposed [consented] extension of the Leisure centre which results in CEC having to relocate the pitch further down the site to ensure safety for pitch users is maintained. The extension and correct future position of the pitch are not shown on the application and the proposals as they stand for gravel paths and wildlife areas are unachievable without having an unacceptable impact on the pitch.

Leisure Services believe that there are numerous questions remaining about the proposal as a whole, not least the running, repair, insurance and maintenance costs of the proposed paths, MUGA, floodlighting, teen facility and pitches. The supporting documentation makes no reference to the future management and maintenance other than to say CEC will maintain

the additional pitch area. Leisure Services have not agreed this and are not in a position to pick up additional maintenance / running costs.

It is considered that the above issue, whilst they need resolving, are not planning matters that would impede the approval of the principle of the scheme, as they mainly relate to land ownership matters. Much of the land covered by the application is owned and managed by CEC, therefore the final control would lie with the Council.

### **Highways access, serving and parking requirements:**

The existing site accommodates a 11-a-side pitch (the "ATAX" pitch), which is accessed from Ovenhouse Lane. It generally experiences highway peaks in activity on a Saturday morning in association with Bollington United Junior Football Club, for which 24 parking spaces are provided for this purpose.

In support of the application, a traffic survey was conducted (*between 09:00 am and 12:00 noon*) during a Saturday morning in 2010. This survey was verified and was considered acceptable for the purpose by Cheshire East Council Highways. This survey identified a maximum occupancy of 25 (capacity +1) for a short period. The survey did not indicate whether the level of occupancy resulted in a proliferation of parking activity onto neighbouring streets for users unable to access the car park. However, it is considered that this figure would be largely representative of likely vehicle demand associated with two 11-a-side teams (16 man squads), match officials and support staff.

The proposed development would replace the existing 11-a-side pitch and provide two additional "mini" pitches. The proposal would be supplemented by 28 additional parking spaces, 23 of which would be of "grasscrete" construction.

Given that the locality of the home team to its likely playing catchment (Bollington), the likelihood of "supporters" to be parents and guardians of players, therefore not creating additional vehicle trips, the propensity for older players to be dropped off and collected by parents and/or guardians (therefore not remaining within the car park) and the likelihood multiple occupancy vehicle use amongst members of the away team, this provision is regarded as generally sufficient to accommodate a further two 7-a-side matches simultaneously. This is assuming four squads of 9 (currently 32 players) generate an accumulation of 25; therefore 36 players might reasonably be expected to generate 28 arrivals, equalling a total demand of 53 spaces.

It is noted that there could be limited demand for 'drop-off' and/or 'collection' on local streets outside of the car park at the end of matches. However, this is considered likely to be of a short term duration and disturbance. On balance therefore, it is considered that it would not warrant the provision of a Traffic Regulation Order to restrict parking on residential streets, which may ultimately prove unpopular with local residents.

It is understood that the pitches would continue to operate at a community level for use by Bollington United Junior Football Club, and would significantly increase the intensity of use over and above the existing level of operation.

### **Amenity Considerations:**



The applicant has confirmed that the site will have a lockable gate which will be closed when the site is not in use to avoid people being able to access the site with vehicles and causing a nuisance. This can be conditioned.

The applicant has also confirmed that the floodlights will only be on the pitches on the ATAX site. The floodlights will be in place to enable the pitches to be used year round. They will only be on when necessary for a football match and will be switched on and off by the football club. As the pitches are used by children and young people any evening matches are generally played early in the evening so the lights will not be on all evening long.

Conditions to control the hours of use and shielding of the floodlight are proposed to be attached to any decision. The recommended hours of use limitation will be updated to Members.

As stated in the description of the proposal, the teen play area is aimed at young teenagers who are too old to use the children's play area but would still like an area where they can meet their friends. There is very little provision of facilities made for this age group and on the whole the idea has been a popular one.

Whilst local resident concerns are understandable, the teen play area is designed to give teenagers an area of their own that they can use and keep them off the streets. It could be argued that if teenagers are hanging around on the streets they are more likely to inadvertently cause a nuisance and intimidate people than if they have a specific area they can go to.

### **Landscaping:**

A new hedgerow and stockfence is proposed to the eastern boundary where the pitches extend into the area of former farmland. A maintenance gate will be included to allow access into the residual area of field acquired which will be let for grazing. Some additional native hedgerow planting will take place to the north east boundary at the site entrance and adjacent to the ditch using similar species. Additional tree groups are proposed to the area to the west of the Leisure Centre to complement the existing tree groups. Overall, it is considered that the proposals would not result in any significant landscape or visual impacts.

### **Protection of existing trees:**

The site contains a number of large mature hedgerow trees associated both with the existing senior and junior pitches. The footprint of the senior pitch located to the west of the Leisure Centre appears to not conflict with the important linear group of Limes located close to the properties on Bollington Road. The re-defined junior area contains three pitches which should be able to be accommodated taking into consideration the requirements of the identified mature trees (RPZ) which are located within the adjacent hedgerows. Level profiles have not been included but the requested regarding should be able to be accommodated, subject to additional details which could be provided as part of condition.

The additional parking has been identified in close proximity to a mature tree, given the social proximity of this tree is extremely poor in relation to the adjacent Leisure Centre building, it is anticipated that the trees predicted retention capability is limited.

That being said, subject to the submission of an updated and revised Arboricultural Impact Assessments, it is considered that the works can progress without having a detrimental impact on trees.

The submitted plans and particulars illustrate which trees are suggested for retention but are not cross referenced with all their Root Protection Areas and respective Tree protection details onto the proposed Master Plan. This is particularly pertinent in terms of the intended cut and fills re-grading. Therefore a levels condition (with a method statement to be agreed) is proposed to be attached to any decision.

### **Ecology Implications:**

The application has been assessed by the Council's Ecologist and it is not anticipated there being any significant ecological issues associated with the proposed development.

### **Public Rights of Way:**

Two public footpaths cross the application site, one Bollington 7 which runs from Bollington Road to Ovenhouse Lane passing close to the Leisure Centre and Bollington 8 which runs from Clarke Lane in the south to Heath Road passing the western boundary of the ATAX site. The Council's Public rights of Way Section have not raised nay objection to the scheme or its proposals.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION**

The proposed development is considered to be an appropriate use within the Green Belt, and will have an acceptable impact upon the visual amenity of the area. Discussions are ongoing with the Leisure Services to resolve their management concerns and they would be separate form the planning process.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A06TR - Levels survey
2. A14TR - Protection of existing hedges
3. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
4. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
5. Sport England - Design of MUGA
6. Sport England - Design of MUGA
7. Surface water drainage scheme

8. Hours of use of floodlights/pitches
9. Site to be locked after hours

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