

Application No: 17/2586M

Location: Alderley Edge School for Girls, Wilmslow Road, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, SK9 7QE

Proposal: Construction of artificial grass hockey pitch on existing school field, with 1.2m perimeter fence, no floodlighting.

Applicant: Simon Malkin, Alderley Edge School for Girls

Expiry Date: 18-Jul-2017

Summary

The NPPF (2012) strongly promotes sustainable development. The fundamental aim being to secure and promote social and economic growth, whilst preserving and enhancing both the built and natural environment.

This development would enhance the existing sports facilities at Alderley Edge School for Girls through the provision of an all-weather pitch which would enable play throughout the year. This would amount to a significant social benefit for the scheme. Wider benefits include enhancing the reputation of the school, and opportunities for younger residents to take part in sport, which indirectly benefits Alderley Edge as an attractive place to live and raise families

Environmentally, it is considered that suitable landscape and boundary treatments, reserved via condition, can ensure that residential amenity is respected. The impact of noise is not considered to be significantly adverse and there are to be no particularly harmful impacts to either the protected trees (TPO), the ecological value of the site, health and safety of residents, nor drainage/flood risk (subject to a drainage scheme).

All objections raised by members of the public, and the Parish Council, have been considered. However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development is a strong material planning consideration. The social benefits of this development would demonstrably outweigh the small environmental harm, ensuring the health, activeness and opportunities for recreation within the existing community, whilst reinforcing Alderley Edge as an attractive place to live.

Thus it is recommended that this application be approved.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to conditions.

REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application is referred to Northern Planning Committee as it has been called-in by the Ward Councillor (Cllr Browne) for the following reason:

“The Parish Council have recommended refusal of this application due to concerns regarding access, parking, over intensification of the site, potential loss of privacy, health & safety concerns, hours of use, commercialisation of the site and loss of amenity with due to increased noise. The Parish Council have also requested a drainage & flood risk assessment, as well as a wider consultation with residents on Brook Lane & Wilton Crescent. This application would therefore benefit from further consideration by Northern Planning Committee

PROPOSAL

This application seeks planning permission for the replacement of a grass hockey pitch with an astro-turf (all-weather) hockey pitch (finished in green) which would be used by Alderley Edge School for Girls (AESG). The application form indicates that the pitch would be available for use between hours of 09.00 – 17.00 every day (see appraisal for reduced hours to be conditioned).

1.2m wire mesh fencing would be erected to the sides of the grounds and mature trees would be planted to north-west corner of the grounds providing screening of the development. The hockey pitch itself would not be full-size, and would not be suitable for official matches, instead comprising 4 smaller pitches for use by students, and for training purposes by AESG.

In order to create the level surface required, the western side of the pitch would be raised in height by 0.5m – 0.8m and excavated to the eastern end, sitting below the natural land level by 1.0m – 1.4m to the northeast corner, there would be a small gabion retaining wall. A ‘long jump run up’ and ‘sand pit’ would be located to the west of the hockey pitch.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site comprises Alderley Edge School for Girls and associated grass sports pitch to the west of the school. It is understood that the existing grass pitch is used for hockey amongst other outdoor sports. Mature trees (some of which protected via TPOs) are established along the eastern, southern and western boundaries of the site. The topography of the area varies slightly with the eastern end of the grounds at a slightly higher land level than the west.

It is understood that the pitch is used by the school only. There are a number of residential properties which border the site to the north and western boundaries. Access to the pitch would be through Alderley Edge School. The applicant has confirmed that they are not aware of any restrictive hours on the existing playing fields.

CONSTRAINTS

Predominantly Residential
Existing Open Space
Tree Preservation Order
Alderley Edge Plan (Designation, regulation 7)

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

Various.

Of particular relevance:

17/2588M - Levelling existing sloping playground by the use of retaining structures, installation of sports weldmesh fencing and floodlighting. *Pending Consideration.*

17/0770M (Land off Lydiat Lane) - Removal of existing dilapidated timber sports equipment store and replacement with new timber sports equipment store of same height. *Approved with conditions.*

05/0361P - Construction of synthetic grass sports pitch with associated perimeter fence and floodlighting. *Withdrawn.*

LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLICY

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy

Policy PG1 (Overall Development Strategy)
Policy SD1 (Sustainable Development in Cheshire East)
Policy SD2 (Sustainable Development Principles)
Policy SC2 (Indoor and Outdoor Sport Facilities)
Policy SC3 (Health and Well-being)
Policy SE1 (Design)

It should be noted that the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 27th July 2017. There are policies within the legacy local plans that still apply and have not yet been replaced. These policies are set out below.

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (2004)

DC3 – Amenity
DC6 – Circulation and Access
DC8 – Landscaping
DC9 – Tree protection
RT1 – Protection of Open Space

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Of particular relevance are paragraphs:

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (as updated online)

Supplementary Planning Documents

Cheshire East Borough Design Guide (2017)

CONSULTATIONS

Alderley Edge Parish Council:

The Parish Council recommends refusal of this application as there are concerns over; access, parking, over intensification of the site, potential loss of privacy, health & safety concerns, hours of use, commercialisation of the site and loss of amenity with regard to noise. The Parish Council also request a drainage & flood risk assessment and wider consultation with residents on Brook Lane & Wilton Crescent.

Noted.

Environmental Health:

The site will only allow for a ¾ size all weather hockey pitch meaning that the pitch is unsuitable for the playing of official matches and would not therefore be used by outside users for match purposes. Hence the proposed pitch would be predominantly used by the school itself. In light of the fact that there would be no serious commercial use and that the proposed pitch would be mainly used by the school, this Service raises no objection. However, conditions regarding 9am – 7pm use (Monday – Friday), 9am – 3pm (Saturday) and no use Sundays/Bank Holidays, would be more appropriate.

- Suggest contaminated land informative
- Hours of construction condition
- Dust control condition

United Utilities:

No objection to the development subject to the following conditions:

- Surface water drainage scheme (submitted and approved by the LPA prior to commencement of works)
- Management and maintenance of Sustainable Drainage System
- Site Drainage informative

Sport England:

No objection subject to a pre-commencement condition regarding the built design and layout.

Recommend the applicant install cable ducting under the surface.

REPRESENTATIONS

16 x letter of support have been received summarised as follows:

- Flood Risk/Drainage
- Impact on properties to the western end and northern side of the playing field
- Application should not have been validated due to minimal information
- Impact on residential amenity through proximity and height of pitch
- Reductions in the size of the pitch should be considered
- School has alternative pitch facilities at Lydiat Lane
- Ground investigations
- Impact on ecology
- Noise impact
- Commercial use
- Future application likely for floodlighting
- Impact on Trees
- Loss of privacy
- Access and parking impact
- Safety due to hockey balls landing in gardens
- Harm to the character of the area/visual amenities
- Sport England comments
- Lack of prior consultation with residents from AESG
- Loss of privacy to 1st floor windows of Oakleigh
- Hockey not appropriate for an area that is predominantly residential
- Pitch will be used for tournaments and matches
- Pitch will be used at weekends
- Traffic impacts
- Construction impact
- Potential for temporary floodlights
- No assurances from school re. commercial use
- Inadequate neighbour consultation by the LPA
- Insufficient information compared to previous submission (05/0361P)
- Suggested conditions should the application be approved.

All objections have been noted and considered. The proposed scheme has been assessed on-site.

In response to some concerns raised:

- *As to whether AESC have consulted with residents prior to submission of their application, this is something that the LPA would always normally encourage this to try to overcome issues earlier, although this is not a necessity. The application as submitted must now be assessed against planning policy*
- *The suggested conditions are noted, although any conditions must comply with the 'condition test' as outlined in the NPPF (paragraph 206)*
- *Sufficient information has been submitted to enable validation of the application.*

- *Concerns relating to floodlighting are noted, as are there inclusion in the previous application (05/0361P) although they do not form part of this application*
- *Construction impacts are not a material planning consideration and may be dealt with through separate legislation*
- *The existing pitch has been used for hockey previously*
- *The application does not indicate commercial use and through suitable restrictive hours conditions, any hockey play later in evenings or extended play at weekends can be restricted.*

All other concerns are addressed in the appraisal.

APPRAISAL

Key Issues

- Principle of development;
- Design considerations
- Character of the area
- Drainage/Flood risk
- Health and safety
- Highway Implications
- Sustainability

Principle of Development

The application site is set within the settlement boundary as defined by the development plan. Within these limits, development is normally acceptable in principle subject to all other material considerations being satisfactory.

The Councils strategic approach to recreation is:

“To improve recreational provision for the benefit of all residents and visitors whilst ensuring that conservation and restraint policies are not undermined.”

Similarly, the NPPF emphasises the important contribution that open spaces, and opportunities for sport and recreation, can make to the health and well-being of communities. At paragraph 70, the NPPF is clear in its guidance that planning decisions should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space (such as sports grounds) as these can enhance the sustainability of communities. Further to this Policy RT1 of the MBLP (which is consistent with the NPPF) emphasises the protection which must be afforded to these spaces.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights that “Physical activity is important in childhood to support healthy growth and development, psychological well-being and social interaction”. As per the justification for policy SC3 (Health and Well-being), encouraging residents to live a healthy lifestyle involves the provision of facilities to encourage regular exercise.

Weight is given to the use of the existing playing field, which is available for hockey use (as has been the case previously) and other outdoor sports. The quality of the playing field could, however, be questioned due to the topography of the site and nature of the permeable surface which throughout the year may be waterlogged preventing suitable play. It could be argued that the times of year when such a surface would be most suitable would, in fact, be summer, outside of the school year. Paragraph 73 of the NPPF stresses that access to high quality open spaces can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. In this specific case, it is apparent that the proposed all-weather surface (and associated wire mesh fencing) would be of a higher quality and this would contribute to a healthier lifestyle for students at AESG. As such, the social benefits of the development are clear, and weigh in favour of the development.

The Council supports an established school which provides recreational and health benefits to younger residents of Alderley Edge, would encourage students to engage in sport from a younger age. The replacement of a grass-pitch with a more durable/playable, all-weather pitch, would comply with the aims of the NPPF, and policies RT1 (MBLP), and SC2, SC3 of the CELPS.

No community use is indicated within the application and it is understood that the all-weather pitched would be used solely by AESG. It is noted that AESG do occupy a much larger pitch along Lydiat Lane, Alderley Edge, and the intention is to use this pitch for grass based sports such as rounders. This site has been subject to an application recently for a replacement storage shed (17/0770m, approved). This does not form part of the application.

Design assessment and effect on the character of the area

In respect of the public realm, the proposed astro-turf surface would not be visible from any significant public vantage points. Furthermore, from perspectives immediately outside the site, mature trees border the grounds which provide a substantial amount of screening. The excavation to the eastern aspect of the grounds (-1.0 to -1.4m) and raising of levels to the west are very modest (+0.5m to +0.8m). These are necessary in ensuring a level playing surface and would not significantly harm the landscape character of the area. The surface would be finished in artificial grass (coloured green) which would harmonise with the surrounding appearance.

To the northwest corner of the grounds, this side is presently void of significant vegetation. A landscape condition has, however, been submitted highlighting a mixture of holly trees (semi-mature standard) and a new hedge to be planted to help screen the proposed pitch.

No issues are raised with the sand pitch and run up, which are very minor alterations. It is uncertain as to whether this aspect of the scheme would actually require planning permission.

Concerns are raised regarding potential use of floodlighting. A condition will be attached to ensure that no floodlights are used on these grounds. This is necessary on grounds of residential amenity.

Parking / Highways

Given that this application simply seeks to replace the surface of the playing fields, and there is no commercial use indicated in the application, it is not considered that parking requirements would be affected, nor would there be any intensification of the use of the access. The Highways department have been consulted, and no objection has been received. It is noted, from both the concerns raised and the Parish Council that parking is an issue in this area. The development, however is not considered to worsen the present situation or peak demand. There is therefore no reason to refuse the application on the above grounds.

Arboriculture impacts

The application is supported by a detailed Arboricultural Statement by Cheshire Woodlands dated 17th May 2017 (Ref CW/8617-AS1)

The statement identifies the loss of a single tree (Yew) identified as G4/1 and the reduction of a dead stem (Holly) G6/1 along with a limited amount of crown lifting of the trees associated with G2 and G6; all the proposed works are considered appropriate and accord with the requirements of prudent Arboricultural management.

In order access the site for construction purposes it is proposed to use the existing car park to the east, as a site compound, with a temporary ramp down into the construction area, this doesn't present any direct or indirect implications for the retained trees which are protected as part of Macclesfield Borough Council (Alderley Edge - Alderley Edge School for Girls) Tree Preservation Order 2005; these details do not appear to form part of the application particulars attached to this submission.

The proposed pitch has been down sized from the previous submission which was withdrawn, but there are still pinch points associated with the proposal, where there's an incursion within or development extends up to RPA's. In order to establish a level playing surface the pitch will be elevated on the western aspect with the eastern end accommodated within an excavated area. The raising of the ground directly impacts on the trees associated with the south western corner of the pitch, and in particular a large mature Sycamore identified as G2/1, and the adjacent Sycamore G2/2; the incursion within the RPA does not exceed 15% of the RPA associated with G2/1 and significantly less in respect of G2/2. Adjacent to the mature Sycamore identified as G6/2 an excavation of up to 250mm is required with 9% of the trees RPA implicated. Both incursions fall below the maximum 20% and are unlikely to cause any significant long term detrimental impact providing the trees are protected during the construction period with both fencing and ground protection, and a suitable arboricultural method statement is provided; these aspects can be addressed by condition

The maximum extent of the excavation at the eastern end of the pitch extends up to the RPA of the mature Sycamore identified as G5/1, with stone gabion cages retaining to ground to the east; subject to suitable protection measures as discussed previously no long term detrimental impact is anticipated.

Drainage details including soakaways have not been provided, but these need to respect the identified RPA's, this can be addressed by condition.

Conditions are requested by the Arboricultural Officer who has recommended conditions be attached regarding details of an Arboricultural Statement, a tree protection scheme, and development being carried out in accordance with Cheshire Woodlands Arboricultural Statement (ref. CW/8617-AS1). Subject to these conditions no concerns are raised in this regard.

Nature Conservation

No concerns are raised in respect of ecology subject to a condition that prior to the removal of vegetation (or demolition/conversion of buildings) between 1st March and 31st March of any given year, a detailed survey shall be carried out to check for nesting birds. Subject to this condition, the Nature Conservation Officer raises no objection and the proposal would accord with policy NE11 (MBLP).

Notwithstanding the details of the landscape plan, a condition will be requested regarding the landscaping scheme ensuring that the hedge is mixed native species

Environmental Health

The restrictive hours as suggested by Environmental Health are agreed with and will be added to the decision notice. In consideration of the recommended dust and hours of construction conditions, these are not considered reasonable, or necessary and would therefore not comply with the 'conditions test' of the NPPF. The application simply seeks to replace a grass pitch with astro-turf and this is not likely to generate significant levels of dust. Hours of construction can be added as an informative. A contaminated land condition will also be added to the decision notice.

Residential amenity

The greatest impact would be upon 'Oakleigh Cottage' to the northern corner of the site, with the front elevation of this dwelling in close proximity to the corner of the hockey pitch. This property does sit at slightly lower land level in relation to the pitch. Concerns are therefore raised in respect of losses of privacy between the users of the pitch, and the occupiers of the house (Ground Floor and 1st Floor) and potential for noise disturbances. Following discussions with the applicant, changes to the scheme have been agreed including considerable landscaping of the northern corner (including a beech hedge) and semi-mature planting of Holly Trees. The latter due to their low canopies would provide extensive screening of the development and also assist with some acoustic screening. Notwithstanding this, details of a close-boarded fence/boundary treatment are also to be requested via condition (to be approved by the LPA) to ensure that further treatments assist with screening and noise mitigation. It is recognised that the existing playing field would presently be noise generative and balls etc could still land within their garden regardless of the outcome of this scheme. Whilst there is the probability that this pitch may be used more extensively during school hours and some after school play, the provision of soft screening and a fence, could arguably represent a betterment of the situation in terms of reducing visibility of the field, reducing stray balls and general noise reduction.

A 1.2m weldmesh fence would border the hockey pitch and the nature of this material is likely to reduce any audible nuisance of shots missing the net etc or passing to the side of the pitch.

It should be argued that the most significant impact would be students shouting, team captains giving orders etc, the usual noises associated with playing sports. These noises would be evident regardless of the replacement pitch. A condition will be attached to the decision restricting play to between 9am – 7pm (Monday to Friday), 9am – 3pm (Saturdays), and no play on Sundays/Bank holidays. These hours of restriction have been requested by Environmental Health, and are considered reasonable and necessary in ensuring the development is sympathetic to surrounding residential amenity.

The raising of the ground to the NW corner of the pitch, would be +0.4m. This is a modest increase and the impact is mitigated by the aforementioned screening measures (which would be ensured via condition).

3.0m high black nylon netting would be erected behind the goal ends. This will help to prevent most shots towards goal (but missing), carrying a significant/direct trajectory towards any rear windows of the dwellings along Wilton Crescent. The density of the trees to the east of the grounds would also help in forming a barrier to such occurrences.

Hockey balls may still land in some gardens. This, however, could occur with the existing layout, and is arguably more likely at present given the lack of fencing around the fields. As evidenced through aerial imagery, this playing field has existed adjacent to AESG for a significant period of time (and aerial photography shows the field having been marked out as a pitch). The relationship between the playing field and surrounding properties is well established, this application simply seeks to replace the existing playing field surface. The principle of this use is well established.

As stated earlier, it is noted that the pitch is not full size and therefore won't be used for any serious competitive play. A number of residents have referred to the initial consultation by Sport England which requested a community use agreement. After discussions with Sport England, this requested condition has been removed and the use is expected to be by AESG only.

Concerns have been raised regarding the use of floodlights. A condition will be attached to the decision ensuring that no floodlights are installed. Conditions will also be added regarding a suitable drainage scheme (to be submitted) and management of drainage for the lifetime of the development.. Such a scheme will prevent significant surface water runoff.

Sustainability

Environmental sustainability

The likelihood is that the pitch would be used more intensively than the existing playing fields. There is the potential, therefore, for a slightly greater impact to residential amenity through increased noise. This impact, however can be adequately addressed through suitable mitigation (namely planting of trees, a larger hedge, and a suitable acoustic fence to be positioned behind the pitch). The impact is not so great to warrant refusal of this application, when assessed against the existing use/situation, and the clear social benefits. No issues are raised in respect of arboriculture, ecology, nor would there be a harmful impact to the visual amenities of the area. The scheme is considered to be environmentally sustainable.

Social sustainability

The proposal would provide a considerable social benefit for part of the younger population within Alderley Edge. By strengthening and modernising the existing sports grounds, AESG would be enhanced as a place to study and this would directly promote physical activity, and indirectly benefit healthy growth, fitness, social interaction and general well-being. Play would be available in most weather conditions during term and some small after-school play (up to 7pm). Both at a national and local policy level, the activeness and health of a community is promoted (SC2 and SC3 of the CELPS, RT1 of the MBLP, and section 8 of the NPPF). This development would be in direct accordance with the thrust of these policies.

Economic sustainability

Small economic benefits include those to local business within Alderley Edge/Wilmslow which may receive additional commerce via the purchase of sports equipment/attire. Some minor benefits also exist to the construction industry.

Summary and Planning Balance

The objections have been noted and considered, however the presumption in favour of sustainable development is a significant material consideration in the determination of this application. Taking into account the merits of the application, and compliance with both local and national planning policy, the proposal satisfies the criteria for sustainable development. In respect of the tests of Paragraph 14, the benefits of the scheme significantly and demonstrably outweigh the increased impacts on the surrounding environment, which are not considered significantly adverse. The social benefits of this development would demonstrably outweigh the small environmental impact, ensuring the health, activeness and opportunities for students at AESG, whilst reinforcing Alderley Edge as an attractive place to live. Following assessment of the plans, this development would comply with policies SC2 and SC3 of the MBLP, and and RT1 of the MBLP. The social benefit of providing an all-weather pitch and enhancing the existing open space weighs considerably in favour of the development, which would not be outweighed by any other material considerations.

Paragraph 14 of the NPPF requires development proposals that accord with the development plan to be permitted without delay. Thus this application goes before the Planning Committee with a recommendation of approval subject to appropriately worded conditions being attached to any grant of permission.

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to conditions.

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to debate, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Planning and Enforcement Manager has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. Development in accordance with plans
2. Three year time limit
3. Materials in accordance with application
4. No floodlighting to be used
5. Submission of a drainage scheme (prior to commencement of development)
6. Sustainable drainage management and maintenance plan (submitted prior to commencement of development)
7. NPPG Drainage Informative
8. Design and Layout of the Artificial Grass Pitch (details submitted prior to commencement of works)
9. Hours of restriction: 9am - 7pm (Monday to Friday), 9am - 3pm (Saturday), No use (Sunday/Bank holidays)
10. Detailed survey for nesting birds
11. Arboricultural works in accordance with Cheshire Woodlands Arboricultural Statement
12. Detailed Arboricultural Method Statement (submitted prior to the commencement of works)
13. Tree Protection Scheme (submitted prior to commencement of works)
14. Landscaping scheme focusing on boundary treatments, specifically acoustic fencing along the northern boundary and a mixed species native hedge to the northwest corner (to be submitted prior to the commencement of works)
15. Notwithstanding the details requested via condition, the development to be in accordance with the approved landscaping
16. Prior to use of development, all boundary treatments to be erected
17. NPPF informative
18. Hours of construction informative
19. Contaminated Land informative

