

Application No: 21/4531C

Location: Sutton Lane Football Pitches, SUTTON LANE, MIDDLEWICH

Proposal: Enhancement of existing leisure centre facilities consisting of construction of two storey detached building alongside existing changing room block, new building to be used for gym and exercise studio facilities, widening of Sutton Lane access road and re-surfacing and extension of existing car park

Applicant: Mr Chris Allman, Cheshire East Council

Expiry Date: 06-Dec-2021

SUMMARY

The application site lies entirely within the open countryside and is a designated protected area of open space recreational facility as determined by the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005.

The development comprises the improvement of an existing outdoor and indoor recreational facility and does not conflict with the other policies of the Local Plan.

The proposed development is appropriate to the character of its locality in terms of the principle and the overall design and would not have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring amenity, ecology, highway safety, flood risk and drainage or trees.

Overall, the proposal development meets the criteria of the relevant policies and is considered acceptable.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve with conditions

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

This application site comprises an area of recreational land (including the narrow access from Sutton Lane) to the immediate south of the Middlewich settlement zone line. To the north and east lies existing residential development. Sutton Lane runs along the western boundary (with open agricultural beyond) and to the south lies a farm and associated pastureland. The site includes an existing car park, pavilion building and four football pitches.

The application site is located wholly within the open countryside and is a protected area of open space recreational facility as designated by the adopted local plan.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This is a full application for enhancement of existing leisure centre facilities consisting of the construction of two storey extension alongside existing changing room block. The new extension will be used for gym and exercise studio facilities, widening of Sutton Lane access road and re-surfacing and extension of the existing car park.

RELEVANT HISTORY

19443/3 - Sports changing accommodation – approved 8th March 1988

7399/3 - Erection of club house and changing rooms for rugby football on land designated for sports and recreation – approved 1st August 1978

5768/3 - Prefabricated precast concrete building – approved 4th October 1977

5614/3 - Erection of club-house and changing rooms for rugby football on land designated for sports and recreation – approved 13th September 1977

3580/1 - Establishment of playing fields, pavilion and parking area – approved 10th June 1976

POLICIES

Local Plan Policy

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS) (Adopted)

PG2 – Settlement Hierarchy
PG6 – Open Countryside
SD1 – Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD2 - Sustainable Development Principles
IN1 – Infrastructure
SC1 – Leisure and Recreation
SC2 – Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities
SC3 – Health and Well-Being
SE1 – Design
SE2 – Efficient Use of Land
SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
SE4 – The Landscape
SE5 – Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
SE7 – The Historic Environment
SE13 – Flood Risk and Water Management
CO1 – Sustainable Travel and Transport

Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review 2005 (CBLP) (Saved Policies)

PS8 – Open Countryside

GR6 – Amenity and Health

GR9 - Accessibility, Servicing and Parking Provision

RC2 – Protected Areas of Open Space

RC4 – Countryside Recreation Facilities

Middlewich Neighbourhood Plan

The local referendum for Middlewich Neighbourhood Plan was held on the 14th March 2019 and returned a 'no vote' (no weight given)

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

CONSULTATIONS (Summary)

Flood Risk and Drainage: No objection subject to condition

Public Open Space: No objection

Environmental Health: No objection subject to conditions

Sport England: No objection subject to condition

United Utilities: No objection subject to drainage condition

Highways: No objection subject to conditions

Cadent Gas: No objection

Archaeology: No comments received at the time of writing this report.

VIEWS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL:

Middlewich Town Council: No comments received at the time of report writing.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:

61 letters of representation have been received and the majority are in support of the application. The letters of objection which have been received are summarised below;

- Highway and pedestrian safety and additional traffic concerns
- Access is unsuitable
- Impact on trees along Sutton Lane
- Insufficient parking provision
- Facilities should include a swimming pool
- Facilities as proposed do not cater to everyone

- Criminal activity and vandalism at the site

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The application site is located within the open countryside where policy PG 6 (Open Countryside) of the CELPS sets out that within the open countryside only certain types of development are acceptable including outdoor recreation and development for public infrastructure.

Policy SC 2 (Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities) of the CELPS sets out that the council will protect (and enhance) existing indoor and outdoor sports facilities where they are readily accessible by public transport, walking and cycling and where the proposed facilities are of a type and scale appropriate to the size of the settlement.

The application is for the improvement to an existing indoor and outdoor sports facilities on the edge of Middlewich town and not the provision of a new facility.

The development is considered to be compliant with Policy PG6 but there some limited harm to the open countryside (through the provision of an extended building and car-park). However, there are benefits associated with this development and the harm will need to be weighed against the benefits.

Impact on Existing Recreational Facility

The existing site currently accommodates 4 playing pitches and this development will also accommodate 4 pitches in a different layout.

The building and car park extension leads to a loss of 3.0% of the current playing field. It is considered that the benefit of the new building creating a multi-functional facility and additional car parking outweighs the minor loss of pitch space.

Sport England has considered the application in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (in particular Para. 97), and against its own playing fields policy, which states:

'Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of:

- all or any part of a playing field, or*
- land which has been used as a playing field and remains undeveloped, or*
- land allocated for use as a playing field*

unless, in the judgement of Sport England, the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions.'

This application relates to the provision of a new indoor/outdoor sports facility or facilities on the existing playing field at the above site. It therefore needs to be considered against exception 5 of the relevant policy, which states:

'The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.'

Revised plans have been received that show the proposed pitch layouts to demonstrate that existing pitch provision can be accommodated on the remaining playing field and the application is considered acceptable in these terms subject to a condition requiring that the pitches as shown are implemented as such.

The proposal will provide improved indoor sports provision in terms of changing facilities, gym, exercise studios and access/parking provision. There will also be benefits in the outdoor pitch provision through drainage/access and pitch provision (an unmarked pitch will be brought back into use). The proposal will provide a improved sports provision for Middlewich and this will also provide opportunities for healthy living and improve health. On this basis the development complies with Policies SC1, SC2 and SC3 of the CELPS.

Design

Policy SE 1 of the CELPS states that *“development proposals should make a positive contribution to their surroundings”*.

It is noted that the application site is located within the open countryside and that the settlement zone line is to immediate north where it is characterised by two storey detached dwellings.

The proposed extension to the building has been designed to be in keeping with the existing building in terms of overall aesthetic; it is a simple, functional design that is appropriate for its end use. The extension would measure 8.0 metres at its maximum and would feature large areas of glass and features such as brise soleil aluminium blades and cladding. The overall scale and massing are considered to be appropriate to the location and application site area and it is not considered that the proposed building would appear as incongruous.

The overall design of the proposed development is considered to be in keeping with the character of the area and is considered to be acceptable. The scale and massing of the proposed development is considered acceptable and the impact on the street scene would not be significant given the existing scenario. It is considered that the proposed extension is acceptable in design terms.

The proposal includes the widening of the access road and the re-surfacing and extension of the existing car park. The materials used for the widening of the road and the re-surfacing of the car park would be tarmac and paving slabs. The car park extension would comprise a geogrid system with gravel infill. This is appropriate to the area and suitable for the end use.

In layout terms the building and car park extension would occupy a small area of the existing grass land. As detailed above (see impact on existing recreation facility) the building and car park extension for the application leads to a loss of 3.0% of the current playing field. It is considered that the benefit of the new building creating a multi-functional facility and additional car parking outweighs the minor loss of pitch and the application is considered to acceptable in design terms.

The proposal is considered to comply with policies SE1, SD1 and SD2 in terms of the design implications.

Amenity

Saved policy GR6 (Amenity and Health) of the CBLP states that development will be permitted provided that the proposal would not have an unduly detrimental effect on amenity due to loss of privacy, loss of sunlight and daylight, visual intrusion, environmental disturbance or pollution, traffic generation, access and parking.

The nearest buildings are the residential dwellings to the north of the application site (Hankelow Close). The nearest dwelling is over 40 m away from the proposed extension and the existing building would be located between the dwelling and the extension. There are no dwellings to the immediate east, south or west that would be impacted by the development.

Given the existing scenario and the scale of the extension as proposed, it is not considered to be contentious in terms of amenity. The other elements of the development (i.e. car park and road widening) are not considered contentious in amenity terms.

Environmental Protection have advised that there are no objections subject to conditions.

It is not considered that there will be a significant impact on the amenity afforded to the occupiers of the nearby dwellings or land uses.

Parking and Access

The existing site consists of playing fields and a changing room block along with 65 car parking spaces. The site is accessed from Sutton Lane which reduces in width to single track on the approach. The same number of playing fields, which will be of similar size, are to remain and the 65 car parking spaces will also be remaining.

The changing room block will be extended and refurbished with a larger and more modern one. In addition to this a gym is proposed alongside 2 studios for exercise classes. The access will also be upgraded.

Sustainable Access

There is an existing pedestrian access from Sutton Lane into the site which is segregated from the carriageway by a grass verge. This access will remain and will provide access to the site from the wider area including the large number of residential properties within

walking distance from the site, and to nearby bus stops on Sutton Lane and Chadwick Road.

Additional dropped kerbs on approach to the site should be included with the proposal and this should be conditioned. Chadwick Road and Sutton Lane also form part of the National Cycle Network Route 5 which runs through much of Middlewich south of the town centre.

Safe and Suitable Access

Sutton Lane is a minor unclassified road with little traffic movement with a carriageway width of approximately 5.5 m wide and is capable of accommodating the additional vehicle movements the proposal will generate.

On approach to the site, it narrows to single car width and it is proposed to widen this approach to 4.8 m wide which is sufficient for a development of this size and provides betterment over the existing access to the pitches.

The existing 65 spaces will remain, and an additional 28 spaces will also be provided. The number of spaces reflects the typical peak parking demand of 3 of the applicant's other sites in Holmes Chapel, Shavington and Nantwich and is considered acceptable.

Covered cycle storage for 10 cycles will be provided adjacent to the building which is acceptable.

A visibility splay on exiting the site has been provided and is sufficient to the north and will be improved to the south to 120 m with the removal of some of the boundary hedge. The splay to the south has not been drawn correctly and will need to be re-submitted for approval but is deliverable and should therefore be conditioned.

The additional gym facilities will generate less than 30 vehicle trips during peak hours, and the highways impact of this will be minimal.

Forestry

The application site is accessed off Chadwick Road and, while the development area is not within a Conservation Area and trees on the site are not afforded protection by a Tree Preservation Order, a number of established highway trees border Sutton Lane as it approaches the existing facility. The application has been supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement. The survey identified 48 trees and 3 hedgerows comprising of 3 individual A Category trees, 19 individual and 1 group of moderate quality B Category trees, 23 individual and 2 groups of low-quality C Category trees and 3 poor quality U Category trees unsuitable for retention irrespective of development.

Three low quality C Category trees are proposed for removal to accommodate the proposal (T050, T051 Ash and T053 Rowan) in addition to 3 dead and declining trees. It is not considered that retained trees on the site will have a significantly inferior relationship with the development to what presently exists. The report has made

provision for tree protection and proposes the use of no dig construction methods within the RPAs of retained off site trees. Provision to mitigate for tree losses has been made within the landscape scheme. The development is considered acceptable in these terms.

Nature Conservation (Ecology)

Great Crested Newts and Other Protected Species

There is a considered low risk that the proposed development may have an adverse impact upon Great Crested Newts and other protected species, which may occur within an adjacent water body/area. The risks will be adequately mitigated against by the implementation of reasonable avoidance measures detailed within the provided Reasonable Avoidance Measures Method Statement and subject to condition.

Ecological Enhancement

Local Plan Policy SE 3(5) requires all developments to aim to positively contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. This planning application will result in some loss of biodiversity as detailed in the submitted Ecological Appraisal, but it also provides an opportunity to incorporate features to increase the biodiversity value of the final development in accordance with this policy.

The applicant has submitted an updated Proposed Landscape plan and Overall Site amendments plan (Ecus Ltd, 14/12/2021, rev A) and an Ecology Mitigation plan (dta, Drw no: 2505-PL-14 Rev B) which includes native species planting, hedgerow restoration, lighting specifications and features for breeding birds.

Conditions are also required relating to breeding birds and badgers.

Flood Risk and Drainage

The flood risk and drainage team and United Utilities have no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions relating to the submission of a detailed drainage strategy which must include information regarding surface water run-off rates, designs storm period and intensity and any temporary storage facilities included, to ensure adequate drainage is implemented on site.

Other Matters

Cadent Gas have advised that there are no objections to the proposed development, which is in close proximity to medium and low pressure assets.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The proposal is an acceptable form of development within the open countryside, but it is accepted that the development will have some limited harm on the open countryside.

In this case the benefits associated with the improvement of an existing recreational facility will outweigh the limited harm of the minor loss of existing playfield and loss of open countryside.

The development will have a neutral impact on amenity, ecology and trees and will have a positive and beneficial impact on the existing highway, parking provision and drainage of the site. The proposed development is considered acceptable in principle and is of a satisfactory design suitable for the end use.

The proposal is therefore in compliance with the policies listed within this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

APPROVE subject to conditions

1. **Time (3 years)**
2. **Plans**
3. **Materials**
4. **Electric Vehicle Charging**
5. **Piling**
6. **Dust Management Plan**
7. **Land contamination**
8. **Soil importation**
9. **Boundary treatment prior to first use**
10. **Dropped kerb access details**
11. **Visibility splay**
12. **Tree retention**
13. **Tree protection and construction measures**
14. **No dig details**
15. **Breeding birds**
16. **Reasonable avoidance measures (ecology)**
17. **Ecological enhancement**
18. **Badgers**
19. **Drainage strategy**
20. **Pitch layout**

In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Development Management, in consultation with the Chair (or in his absence the Vice Chair) of Southern Planning Committee, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

