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Dear Paul

Granchester Road Tennis Facility – S/1808/12/FL – additional and amended information

Following the second consultation round, public exhibition and representations made to the application I am now able to provide formal amendments to the proposal and provide clarity on a number of points. In no particular order I cover the following points that have been raised:

Amended Drawings

Enclosed with this letter are the following drawings:

- 002 Rev A – Site Layout
- 006 P1 – Proposed Long Elevations and Site Sections
- S08810026-01 Rev A – Detailed Landscape Proposals

The amended drawings include a number of detailed changes to respond to the landscape officer comments and detailed layout matters. In summary these changes are:

1. Notation added: "Gap up existing hedge where possible with native species as per the native hedge mix on the planting schedule" to the western boundary;
2. Remove proposed trees to the north western corner of the field adjacent to the proposed tennis courts;
3. Move the northern row of tennis courts eight metres to the east to be further from the root protection area of the existing trees to the west;
4. Move the proposed native hedge adjacent to the south of the proposed tennis courts by six metres to give more space for the hedge to grow and space for maintenance;
5. Move proposed trees along the western field boundary into the wildflower field margin to be more in character with field and planting patterns;
6. Add groupings of trees to the southern corners of the field;
7. Move trees in the south of the field into the native hedge proposed along the southern site boundary to be more in character with field and planting patterns;
8. Move access road three metres to the west to provide more space for the permissive footpath and ecology buffer;

9. Permissive footpath, running parallel to access road, to be low maintenance amenity grass maintained no longer than 75mm, the adjacent ecology buffer would be maintained to have taller grass;
10. Additional tree planting to the north eastern corner; and
11. Notation added to the north eastern corner - "Emergency Vehicular access to tennis club"

Permissive Path

A number of representations make reference to the permissive path that runs along the eastern edge of the site and then splits east and west at the south-east corner of the field. The drawings allow for the retention of this path and the continued permissive use of it.

Floodlights

There is some confusion as to the number of floodlights that the scheme is proposing. This amended submission confirms this as being to only two courts; courts one and two, which are to the immediate west of the pavilion.

There has been some suggestion that the courts to the south of the pavilion should be flood lit instead of courts one and two. There are pros and cons as to which courts are lit. The preference is for courts one and two to be lit as shown, but if the matter was significant to a planning permission being granted then alternative courts can be considered.

Drainage

A number of representations make reference to localised flooding and the potential impact of the scheme on flood risk.

Prior to the application being first submitted consultation was made with the Environment Agency on matters of flood risk to ensure this matter is duly considered from the very start. The Environment Agency make no objection to the proposal.

Any drainage strategy would have to ensure that the water runoff is no greater than the existing Greenfield runoff rate.

The proposal is to have permeable surfaces to the tennis courts and hardstandings. If the infiltration rates for the land are found to be poor then runoff attenuation would be incorporated by holding water on site before discharging into the drainage system.

A high water table has been suggested. The archaeological investigations earlier this year involved the digging of trenches with a digger. No standing water was found in the trenches. The site is on a higher ground level than Fill Brook and Bin Brook and further away from these Brooks than the housing, so there may well be a different water table level in comparison to the ground levels. The normal practice would be to undertake ground investigations following a planning consent and design a detailed drainage system accordingly.

Highway and Access

Prior to the application being formally submitted, consultation was made with the County Highway Authority to scope out the extent of highway assessment that is necessary to review the proposal. A traffic and speed survey of vehicles using Grantchester Road has been undertaken to inform the proposal. The access design has then been led by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, being the up-to-date highway design guidance.

The car park is not intended for use other than by the tennis club, a planning condition could be attached to a planning permission to ensure this detail.

There will be no vehicular traffic using the link between Fulbrooke Road and the site, this link will only provide for pedestrians and cyclists. A vehicular gate is shown to the north east of the site towards the link, but this will only provide emergency access for the tennis facility. A planning condition could be attached to ensure the tennis club can only use the vehicular link for emergency access only.

It is proposed that the tennis facility will be operated by Cocks and Hens Tennis Club. The Club currently operate from Clerk Maxwell Road with 10 tennis courts. To form a base line it is right and proper to undertake a traffic survey of the existing facility. The new facility at Grantchester Road would not necessarily operate in exactly the same way, but it can give a good indication. The robustness of the highway design is not limited to the findings of the traffic survey; rather it is capable of servicing increased traffic generation if the Club did generate increased movements compared to its location on Clerk Maxwell Road.

Hours of Use

During the planning application process the Environmental Health Department has set a time of 21.30hrs for the flood lights to be turned off. A planning condition can be imposed to secure this. Cambridge City Council has suggested that a planning condition be imposed upon the hours of use of the pavilion. 23.00hrs is suggested to allow time for members to shower and change without undue rush after play. Vehicular traffic would travel southwards onto the Grantchester Road, so there would be limited noise nuisance to neighbouring properties.

Archaeology

Ground intrusive investigations have been undertaken in mid-January 2013, following the agreement of the specification of the works with the County Archaeological Department. A Report presenting the evaluation of the findings is enclosed, and copy has been issued to the County Archaeological Department. There are no findings of archaeological significance.

Green Belt

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that outdoor sports and recreation are appropriate uses in the Green Belt, indeed that such opportunities in the Green Belt should be positively planned for.

Important matters contained in the NPPF that need to be taken into account are at paragraphs:

7. A social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being;

17. Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, a set of core land-use planning principles should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. These 12 principles are that planning should:

...take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

70. To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

...plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments



73. 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. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.

81. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

87. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

88. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

89. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

... provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

As to what appropriate facilities are (paragraph 89). The superseded PPG2 'Green Belts' is helpful. At its paragraph 3.4 it arguably has a higher test to the NPPF of 'essential' rather than 'appropriate' facilities. Paragraph 3.5 goes on to give more detail on what essential facilities are and include, as an example, spectator accommodation. I believe this pushes the term 'facilities' beyond merely those facilities contained with the building, but are facilities more widely appropriate.

"3.4 The construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for the following purposes:

- essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it (see paragraph 3.5 below);

3.5 Essential facilities (see second indent of paragraph 3.4) should be genuinely required for uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. Possible examples of such facilities include small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or small stables for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation."

It would be perverse for the guidance to allow for outdoor sports as appropriate development, and make all ancillary facilities to that principle use inappropriate. Paragraph 89 of the NPPF allows for appropriate facilities in the recognition that outdoor sports require some supporting facilities, whether this be goal posts, pavilion, store room, access road, security, spectator facilities or tennis fencing. There is an assessment still to be had as to the impact on the openness of the Green Belt from the facilities and the use of them, but by definition they are not inappropriate.

All the facilities proposed are appropriate for outdoor sport. The courts, lighting, fencing, car park, access road and pavilion are all necessary facilities to allow for the tennis club to function. Each facility is design and located to reduce its potential impact on the landscape and Green Belt.

It is considered that the development is appropriate development in accordance with Paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

If a judgement was, nevertheless, made by the Council that elements of the proposal are inappropriate then the consideration has to be made as to whether the inappropriateness or other harm is outweighed by other considerations. In terms of any harm created by the development this is considered to be most limited being that the development is contained to the northern part of the site where it is most closely associated with the backdrop of trees and existing hedgerow boundaries; the lighting is designed to minimise any light spill; the pavilion is to the lowest Sport England guidance; the pavilion is single storey; mitigation planting is to be provided and the limited perimeter fencing will be post and rail (rather than a solid screen).

A significant hedge is to be planted to the southern side of the courts to provide a planted boundary, a hedge that can be planted outside of a planning application.

Balanced against any harm or inappropriateness are the benefits and special circumstances of the proposal.

The NPPF clearly supports outdoor sports uses. The development will enable the construction of a purpose-built tennis club, for a club that has an open membership policy. It will support the health and well-being of the local community. Tennis is a sport that appeals to a very large age range so a facility that is more likely to provide these health and well-being benefits to a wider section of the community.

Planning Authorities should make decisions to give 'access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation [that] can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities.' [NPPF para 73] and 'to provide opportunities for outdoor sport [in the Green Belt]' [NPPF para 81].

The provision of a new purpose built tennis facility is an important and special circumstance that weighs in favour of the proposal.

I trust you find this overview of the amendments and the clarity on a number of points useful. Should you have any further queries then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely


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