

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

4 June 2014

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number: S/2239/13/FL

Parish: Sawston

Proposal: Erection of football ground for Cambridge City Football Club and creation of new community recreational space

Site address: Land to the north of Deal Grove, Off Babraham Road, Sawston

Applicant(s): Mr Len Satchell

Recommendation: Refusal

Key material considerations: Principle of development, effect on openness of Green Belt and need for very special circumstances, visual impact, highway safety, sustainability, neighbour amenity and ecology

Committee Site Visit: Yes

Departure Application: Yes

Presenting Officer: Nigel Blazeby

Application brought to Committee because: Referral to Committee requested by Councillor Bard

Date by which decision due: 3 February 2014

Executive Summary

1. The application relates to the erection of a 3,000 capacity football stadium for Cambridge City Football Club (CCFC) and the provision of land for community recreation use. It is proposed the facilities within the stadium would also be available for hire in order to generate income for the club.
2. The site is located in the Green Belt on the edge of Sawston, and was historically used for the tipping of inert waste. The proposal is considered to constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt by definition. It is also considered to result in additional harm to the openness of the Green Belt, to have a harmful visual impact within the landscape and to be sited in a location that would result in unsustainable modes of travel.

3. The applicant's agent has sought to argue that the proposed development would bring forward a number of benefits that would outweigh any in-principle objections to development of this site. These arguments are considered in the report and, whilst it is acknowledged the development would bring forward some benefits to the local and wider community, these factors are not considered to carry sufficient weight to constitute the 'very special circumstances' required to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The recommendation is therefore one of refusal.

Planning History

4. S/0843/77 – Reclamation of site by controlled tipping of top/sub soil and inert builders materials – Temporary permission granted.
5. S/2097/78 - Controlled tipping (extension of S/0843/77) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
6. S/0826/81 – Controlled tipping (extension of S/2097/78) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
7. S/1797/83 – Controlled tipping (extension of S/0826/81) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
8. S/1772/85 – Controlled tipping (extension of S/1797/83) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
9. S/1784/87/F – Factory, office and extension to tile stacking area – refused and dismissed at appeal.
10. S/2298/87 - Controlled tipping (extension of S/1772/85) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
11. S/2781/88 - Controlled tipping (extension of S/2298/87) for surface soil, subsoil and inert materials – approved.
12. S/2005/90 – Top/subsoil tipping to prepare the area for landscaping – approved.
13. S/1059/97/O – Residential development, public open space and relief road – withdrawn.
14. S/0499/07 – 2.4m high fence along 112m stretch of woodland bordering Woodland Road – approved.
15. S/0430/13/EI – Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion request relating to the relocation of Cambridge City Football Club. The Local Planning Authority considered that an EIA would not be required.

Planning Policies

16. *National Planning Policy Framework 2012*
17. *Local Development Framework 2007*

ST/1: Green Belt
DP/1: Sustainable Development
DP/2: Design of New Development

DP/3: Development Criteria
DP/4: Infrastructure and New Developments
DP/7: Development Frameworks
GB/1: Development in the Green Belt
GB/2: Mitigating the Impact of Development in the Green Belt
GB/5: Recreation in the Green Belt
NE/1: Energy Efficiency
NE/2: Renewable Energy
NE/3: Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development
NE/6: Biodiversity
NE/11: Flood Risk
NE/14: Lighting Proposals
NE/15: Noise Pollution
CH/2: Archaeological Sites
TR/1: Planning for More Sustainable Travel
TR/2: Car and Cycle Parking Standards
TR/3: Mitigating Travel Impact
Trees and Development Sites SPD
Biodiversity SPD
District Design Guide SPD
Landscape in New Developments SPD

18. *Draft Local Plan 2013*

S/1: Vision
S/2: Objectives of the Local Plan
S/3: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
S/4: Cambridge Green Belt
S/5: Provision of New Jobs and Homes
S/7: Development Frameworks
CC/1: Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
CC/2: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation
CC/3: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Developments
HQ/1: Design Principles
NH/4: Biodiversity
NH/8: Mitigating the Impact of Development in and adjoining the Green Belt
NH/10: Recreation in the Green Belt
SC/4: Meeting Community Needs
SC/10: Lighting Proposals
SC/11: Noise Pollution
SC/12: Contaminated Land
TI/2: Planning for Sustainable Travel
TI/3: Parking Provision

Consultations

19. **Sawston Parish Council** – “The Parish Council support this application but as it is such a significant/important application we feel the final decision should be made in public and request this goes to the planning committee for determination and we also feel this should be accompanied by a site visit by the planning committee before decision made.”

In a further response, the Parish Council states:

“There is no mention of the impact with evening functions and car boot sales. The closing time was agreed as 11.45pm and car boot sales 10am-2pm, with no set-up time before 9am.”

20. **Babraham Parish Council** – “Babraham Parish Council object to this application. Having seen it before and objected to it on that occasion we note that there is nothing fundamentally new in this application: our objections therefore remain the same. A football stadium would result in unacceptably high levels of traffic through Babraham. The applicant’s offer of land for community use in Sawston is disingenuous as there are no available funds to maintain this land or to erect a building such as a pavilion on it.”

In a later response, Babraham Parish Council states:

“**Babraham Parish Council** (BPC) is dismayed to hear that Sawston Parish Council (SPC) voted in favour of this proposal. Of a potential 15 SPC councillors only 9 attended and the vote was 6 in favour and 3 against. This is a very small majority and we understand that most of the public in attendance (20+) were against the proposal. We note that, some way into the Planning Statement (pp 26 and 35) the applicant now intends to hold conferences and weddings and that the pitch would be ‘suitable for heavy use’. We understand that, as well as actual matches, training sessions would take place daily. It was also suggested at the SPC meeting that car boot sales would take place starting at 6am on Sundays.

The increased amount of traffic that would be caused should this proposal be allowed to go ahead is totally unacceptable to us. Babraham High Street would become a rat run from the A1307 to the football ground and the ‘Wych’ (the small country road between the A505 and Babraham) would also be exploited.

The amendment to this plan to allow Sawston village to use the football club’s facilities is a cynical attempt to gain local support. Should this go ahead existing local facilities, such as those at Sawston Village College, would be threatened.

Should the proposed houses on the brownfield site adjacent to this site be built, access would be shared, with a further inappropriate increase in traffic.

We urge the Planning Committee to refuse this application.”

21. **Trees Officer** – No objections. The site appears well treed but the quality of the trees is poor. There is a TPO’d area to the south outside the site. There would be extensive vegetation removal to deliver the project which will appear potentially catastrophic from an outside perspective. However, there are no grounds to serve a TPO to protect trees on the site. The arboricultural report proposes replacement planting as part of the landscaping strategy. This must be robust and delivered.
22. **Landscape Design Officer** – No objections providing a landscaping condition is added to any planning permission.
23. **Ecology Officer** – Objects to the application on the grounds of ecological impact and questions the appropriateness of the site in principle.

The principal objection relates to the loss of woodland. The site is surrounded by semi-mature woodland including stands of beech, oak and ash, and the proposal results in the loss of much of the oak and beech woodland to the north of the site. The intention to plant new trees within the former railway line is noted but, given the

shaded nature of the railway line and the likelihood it consists of poor, compacted and potentially contaminated ground, trees (if able to grow at all) will take many decades to achieve the size and form of those to be removed. Any woodland that remains will be significantly affected by light pollution and noise – light spillage can affect species associated with them but can also cause trees to change their growth patterns. The stadium itself will also cause some shading of trees and alter the movement of air over trees.

If any form of development is allowed, a different layout should be considered. Any development should be located in the more open area given that the arrangement of the stadium has not allowed for the full retention of the northern woodland block.

The ecological assessment stated that only grass snakes were found. As the site has taken in part of any old railway line, there is potential for common lizards to be present.

The assessment stated the trees have negligible to low bat roost potential. However, a number of trees in the main affected area have dense ivy, and the ash trees towards the south have many trees with a higher degree of bat roost potential. To have only undertaken two bat survey transects is inadequate. One of the evening surveys observed no bats but this is surprising as the site has a complex nature of open spaces with much feeding potential for bats.

There is evidence of badger excavations along the north part of the disused railway line. This may have been recent colonisation as no extensive sett was found. Badgers would require protection through the course of any development and this could be resolved by planning condition.

The presence of open habitats in close proximity to dense bramble and scrub raises questions about the importance of the site for summer migratory birds. No specific breeding bird survey information has been provided and should be supplied. The site falls within the definition for open mosaic habitats and could be considered as a priority habitat for Biodiversity Action Plan conservation.

The assessment for great crested newts and plants is accepted unless any new information is brought to light.

Open mosaic habitats are important for invertebrates. No such surveys have been conducted. However, a local resident has undertaken small moth sampling and has recorded two species. Due to the site's undisturbed and dark nature, it could be important for invertebrates and this requires further investigation. This can be dealt with by way of planning condition.

The deciduous trees will not screen the development nor stop light pollution from degrading the Green Belt. The application will also result in the loss of an open watercourse. Although currently in a poor state, it should be a feature for restoration rather than simply burying underground.

24. **Environmental Health Officer (EHO)** – Recommends that the following conditions be added to any consent:

- Hours of operation of the stadium and main car park should be restricted to 7am-11pm Monday-Saturday and 9am-10pm on Sundays and bank holidays.
- Details of any plant/equipment/tannoy system.

- Floodlighting to community land to be time controlled and switched off at 22.30 hours.
25. **EHO (Contaminated Land)** – The site is a former inert waste tip and part consists of a former railway. The Phase 1 and 2 reports have identified that more work is required to establish the extent of the remedial measures required. To do this, further detailed risk assessment is required, in particular for the area to be ‘gifted’ to the Parish for recreational use. Additionally, further gas monitoring is required as suggested in the report. Any consent should be subject to a condition requiring: proposals for the removal, containment or rendering harmless of any contamination to be submitted and approved; works specified in remediation statement to be completed and a verification report submitted and approved; remediation of any additional contamination found during remediation works.
26. **EHO (Air Quality)** – No in principle objections with the air quality impact subject to informatives to cover the following: air pollution and noise from demolition or construction sites – no bonfires; measures to minimise dust during construction; restricted working hours.
27. **Section 106 Officer** – No comments received.
28. **Contracts Manager** – No comments received.
29. **LHA** – Recommends refusal for the following reasons:

The applicant has failed to submit any information with regards to the pedestrian and cycle routes through the business park. Information on times HGV's operate is required as conflict between HGV's and pedestrians/cyclists on football days could cause problems. There is currently no footpath or cycleway and no lighting on parts of Grove Road and West Way. This should have been addressed in the application.

Further information on the other uses of the stadium should be provided, including how many people are expected to use these facilities at one time and when the travel will take place.

Parking levels will need to be provided with an analysis of predicted use. There are no parking restrictions on the surrounding streets so the parking will need to be managed well to avoid any negative impacts on the local area.

How would the applicant accommodate 10 coaches as it appears from the plan submitted that the three shown at present are unable to turn within the site.

Has the football ground opposite the site has been taken into consideration as the applicant has failed to mention if the two clubs may clash at any point?

30. County Council New Communities

- Grove Road is a private road (15mph) that currently serves the Business Park which has high levels of HGV traffic. It does not have footpaths along its length and is therefore unsuitable for use by pedestrians and cyclists due to potential conflicts with HGV's.
- The nearest bus stops are within 800m on Babraham Road, with reasonably frequent services to Cambridge, Sawston, Duxford and Saffron Walden on weekdays.

- The traffic surveys took place on 24th April. A ladies football match was taking place at the time. Reassurance should be provided that the local football traffic is included in the base and future year scenarios.
- Clarification whether local football match traffic captured in traffic surveys are included in the base and future year scenarios.
- Accident analysis required.
- Information on other uses – nature and frequency.
- Clarification of survey of existing football ground to assess current attendance levels and mode split.
- What is proposed growth in attendees based on?
- Why are the travel survey results referred to as ‘approx’ if they are based on survey data?
- Why are only 210 attendees being considered for the 2014 scenario when the planning statement identified an average attendance of 338.
- Further consideration needed of mode split applied to site given the location relative to sustainable modes.
- How have the origins and destinations for attendees been identified?
- How has the projected number using the shuttle bus been determined?
- The applicant would be expected to provide, manage and fund the shuttle buses into the future.
- A management plan is required detailing where the shuttles will collect people, where collection points will be to identify the number of shuttles required.
- Junction modelling should be re-run with the pedestrian phase included for all scenarios.
- Where will people park when demand exceeds supply? The potential for on-street parking in residential streets should be considered in full with potential mitigation measures.
- Where staff would park and clarification of overflow parking level.
- Clarification on the number of cycle spaces and how this has been calculated.
- It is not clear what controlling the private access road on match days involves and how it will be managed.

31. **County Archaeology** – No comments as the site is primarily landfill and therefore most of the archaeology that may have been present will have been destroyed. The southern portion of the site is to be retained as is, avoiding any disturbance to the moated site within its bounds.

32. **Environment Agency** – No objection in principle. Any permission would need to be subject to the following conditions: Contamination risk assessment; Contamination remediation (if applicable); Surface water disposal scheme; Surface water drainage scheme; Scheme to treat and remove suspended solids from surface water run-off during construction works.
33. **Anglian Water** – No comments received.
34. **Cambridgeshire FA** – States it is keen to see CCFC secure a site that will provide long-term tenure and somewhere the club can call home after the loss of Milton Road whilst remaining close to Cambridge. There have been various meetings with CCFC to ensure the designs meet the appropriate FA standards for this type of project. Cambs FA will continue to support the project on the basis of a clear, transparent and sustainable business plan for the club that can deliver the stadium, adjoining 3G pitch and the long-term future of CCFC.
35. **Sport England** – The new stadium would be a replacement for CCFC's previous facility in Milton Road, which was granted permission for residential development in 2012. The stadium was vacated in 2013 and the club currently ground shares with Histon FC. Sport England objected to the proposal to redevelop Milton Road as consent was granted without a replacement facility being secured. The new stadium would replace existing facilities whilst the new 3G pitch would offer significant additional benefits for community sport in the locality.

In 2013, Sport England carried out an assessment of all-weather pitch provision in South Cambridgeshire. This identified five facilities within the district including two 3G pitches at Linton Village College and Comberton Leisure Centre. The study identified unmet demand equating to 0.76 pitches within the district and that current pitches are operating at 99% capacity during peak times. One of the facilities has apparently closed recently and another is under threat. There are no 3G facilities in Cambridge City itself further strengthening the case for an additional 3G facility to serve the wider area. Sport England consider the proposal addresses a need for this facility type and has the potential to be of benefit to the development of sport in general and football in particular in the locality. The facilities meet FA design standards, and the proposed stadium meets the FA national ground grading requirements for the level of football the club currently play at.

The main purpose of the development is to meet the needs of CCFC but a significant driver is also to deliver wider community sport. The application identifies the potential for the facility to be used for community sport and this intention should be consolidated by way of a community use agreement to be secured by planning condition. A condition should also be imposed requiring further details of community grass pitches to be provided on the gifted recreational land.

36. **Cambs Fire & Rescue Service** – Any planning permission should be subject to a condition requiring adequate provision to be made for fire hydrants.
37. **Police Architectural Liaison Officer** – Raises no objections. Match days will cause some congestion for a short time at the end of each match, this only occurring on a Saturday afternoon or Tuesday evening but traffic is light in Sawston at these times. With a low average attendance and approximately 150 cars, match day parking and traffic flow would be manageable. On the rare occasions where an FA Cup match has seen a larger crowd, special measures could be put in place to aid traffic flow from the site.

38. **Cambridge Past, Present & Future** – Object on the grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt are inappropriate with exceptions including the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, recreation etc. It is considered this exception does not amount to the construction of major new buildings such as a stadium. The draft Local Plan does not propose the provision of a football stadium on the site but does provide for the construction of some 450 houses on the old Marley Tiles site as well as to the north and south of Babraham Road. The consequence of all this development will be to overload Babraham Road which is already congested at peak times. Adding the football stadium will exacerbate the situation. Whilst the need for CCFC to find a permanent home is appreciated, this is not considered to be of sufficient importance to justify breaching the NPPF policy for protecting the Green Belt.

Representations

39. District Councillor David Bard – Assumes an application of this size and importance would come to committee, especially if the officer recommendation conflicts with that of the Parish Council (who voted 6:3 to support the application). Requests a committee site visit.

“This is a major application, supported by the Parish Council, which could potentially bring significant benefits to Sawston in the form of additional recreational facilities. There are, however, several issues which need to be addressed if the application is to be approved.

Green Belt:

In Section 4.1, of the Planning Statement (planning history) there is no reference to a significant application and appeal decision, S/1784/87/F by Marley UK to create a tile stacking area. This was refused by SCDC on 07/10/1987 and an appeal dismissed by the Secretary of State on 22/07/1988. The inspectors report cites the green belt status of the area as the principal reason for dismissal. In the light of this decision, the claim in Para 4.2 that the land ‘regained its status as green belt’ in 1993 is clearly incorrect. The land is, however, clearly brownfield and hence an exception could be justified under NPPF Para 89 bullet point 6 as well as bullet point 2.

The current Draft Submission Local Plan, however, proposes the release of some 16.5 Ha of green belt land to the East of Sawston for housing (sites H1/b & H1/c). These areas comprise Grade II agricultural land and are more visible from the main Eastern approach to Sawston than the proposed stadium site. If developed they would therefore have a far more deleterious effect on the openness of the green belt and the setting of Sawston. It would be illogical and inconsistent to release Sites H1/b and H1/c from green belt whilst maintaining that the stadium development had a significant adverse effect either on the openness of the green belt or on the setting of Sawston and by implication performed the function of green belt better than the proposed Local plan sites.

The approach of allowing this application as an exception site in green belt provides greater safeguards than releasing it from green belt. The Planning Statement Para 6.1.3 refers to the pressure in general and in Paras 5.5 and 5.6 on this club in particular, to sell stadium sites for general development. Whilst in no way suggesting that CCFC has any current long term plans to do this, continuing green belt status would provide an additional safeguard against this happening in the future.

Transport / traffic

Para: 7.2.3 of the Planning Statement notes that the site is 800m from a 'bus station'. There is no bus station in Sawston and what is apparently being referred to here is the bus stop at the N end of Sunderlands Avenue. Measurement following the approved route through Dales Manor Business Park gives a distance of 1100m. It should be also be noted that this stop serves Southbound services only and the nearest stop for North (Cambridge) bound services is a further 200m away at the N. end of Churchfield Ave. Given these distances and the fact that the Citi 7 service is hourly after 19:00 suggests that unless a dedicated service were provided on match days, public transport would be little used.

Even assuming, however, that realistically, most supporters will travel to the site by car, predicted traffic flows generated by the stadium based on current gate numbers are likely to result in less than the current peak movements although this assessment may need to be revised to take into account the cumulative effect of any future housing development to the East of Sawston. It is essential, however, that if this application is approved an enforceable transport plan is included within the conditions. Such a plan has been offered by the applicants (Traffic Report, Para 5.25). Provision within the transport plan should also be made for non-match functions such as receptions and car boot sales.

Effect on present and future housing

Para: 7.2.5 of the Planning Statement suggests that the access to both the stadium and community facilities will be through an industrial estate. This statement ignores the suggested Local Plan allocation H1/a which could potentially result in an estate of up to 200 dwellings on the site immediately to the South East of the proposed stadium. Whilst exact details are not forthcoming from either the present applicant or Salmon Harvester, the promoter of H1/a, the submitted Site Masterplan suggests that access to the stadium would have to be through Site H1/a. It should be noted that H1/a is the only proposed Sawston housing site which has the support of the Parish Council and the least number of public representations in opposition.

It is essential that, if approved, an access is provided that would result in the least disruption to present and future residents. This could ideally be achieved by constructing a new access road skirting the Eastern boundary of Dales Manor Business Park. This may, however, be unacceptable on viability grounds.

Conclusion:

In summary, the arguments for and against this application are finely balanced. The offer of additional prepared recreational space to the Parish Council would clearly be of benefit to the community as would the provision of an additional function venue within the village. The principal planning argument against the application would appear to be the current green belt status. This argument would, however, be seriously undermined were the Local Plan to approve housing development on adjacent green belt sites of far higher quality. It is essential that any permission takes into account the potential impact of the development on future as well as existing housing developments and that a robust transport plan is put in place."

40. Approximately 184 letters of support have been received. The main points raised are:

- The proposal would make use of a disused former landfill site.

- The NPPF supports the provision of facilities for outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt.
- Green belt may need to be sacrificed for proposed housing nearby. The Council should take a balanced view on Green Belt.
- Many football teams in the country are relocating to edge of town locations.
- Clubs at level of CCFC are required to have a 3,000 capacity stadium.
- Policy should be put aside and consideration given to the strong local support.
- Would not be a significant intrusion into open countryside.
- Due to the relatively small crowds and the fact many supporters car share, traffic is unlikely to be a problem. The projected 150 cars would be negligible.
- Traffic would be on a limited number of days per year at off-peak times and the impact would be negligible compared to the amount of housing (existing and proposed) in the area.
- There is ample on-site parking so there will be no need to park in surrounding streets.
- Due to low attendance figures, noise and disturbance to adjacent residents would be negligible.
- Histon FC has had a big benefit on the village but little impact. A local resident states the club has had no detrimental impact on quality of life in terms of traffic, light pollution, noise and hooliganism.
- Would provide facilities for Cambridge Women's FC, who currently play home games at Ely City as there is no available affordable ground in Cambridge that meets league criteria.
- As well as providing a new home for CCFC, the development would benefit the community through the provision of new facilities (sporting, recreational and social). The proposal could increase sport use in the village.
- Sawston needs more facilities, football pitches and open space, particularly given the intended housing growth. Currently 18 teams share an existing ground in the village for training, and this often becomes unusable in winter months.
- Village has no village hall and the meeting and function facilities will be of value to the village.
- The recreation ground should include a state of the art play area for children.
- The development would increase trade for local business and create job opportunities.
- Would fulfil the desire to build on the Olympics legacy.

41. Approximately 42 letters of objection have been received. A number of the letters generally supporting the proposal also raised a few issues/concerns and these are summarised in this section. The main points raised are:
- The proposal would result in unacceptable development of Green belt land.
 - There would be a harmful visual impact on the surrounding landscape.
 - The average attendance is not worth the disruption to the green belt and associated problems from use.
 - Babraham Road is unsuitable for the volume of traffic that would be generated. People will park along side roads causing congestion and disturbance to adjoining residents.
 - Access roads are not suitable for the football traffic and events such as car boot sales.
 - Access via Wakelin Avenue would bring many cars into a residential area.
 - Noise disturbance to surrounding residents from football matches and late night events.
 - Noise impact on residents in Fairfields and Broadmeadow due to adjacent access road.
 - Noise impact assessment is not thorough and just states impact 'may be significant' in a worst-case scenario.
 - Supporters tend not to use car parks and prefer to park on surrounding streets in order to get away quickly.
 - Impact on local residents from floodlighting.
 - Litter problems.
 - A local resident who used to live near Soham FC states that on overcast nights the light reflected from the clouds and would be visible from a large area.
 - The site has thriving wildlife including an important rookery in mature trees.
 - Light pollution would affect movements, hunting ability and corridor use of several animals such as bats and tawny owls.
 - A local resident has been surveying moths in the area. One species recorded twice last year is presumed to be a Red Data Book species. Habitats that appear to be important for this species include open rough ground and disused railways raising the possibility the moth is breeding on and around the proposed site. Also observed several other uncommon species of moth likely to be breeding on and around the site.
 - The reports do not address the amount of water the site would use or impact on the rest of the village. Water pressure is already a concern for residents.

- A representation received from Sawston Girls FC expresses concern that both clubs would be competing over the same player resource and alleges that CCFC has actively tried to recruit players for the girls team from the main primary schools in Sawston.
- There are sufficient training and football facilities in the village (Mill Road, Link Road, Spicer's and a Sports Centre) and these would be underfunded and underused if the stadium was built.
- Sawston Village College (SVC) is an integral part of village life, and its Sports Centre (including gym, swimming pool and astroturf pitch) is a very well used amenity in the village. The Village College facilities are run on a not-for-profit basis, with any profits used to maintain, develop and enhance sports facilities for. It is vital for SVC to be able to retain and possibly increase custom and membership of the Sports Centre, and the proposal (which includes a 3G pitch for private hire and conference facilities) could have a detrimental impact on the college being able to do so. Cambs schools are the lowest funded in the country and any loss of revenue would eventually impact on the achievement of pupils.
- Sawston Villlage College would have reduced access to funding from bodies such as Sport England if the scheme goes ahead. Its Astroturf pitch is 8-10 years old and needs resurfacing.
- The gifted recreation ground would need a source of finance for its management.
- If approved, roads and footways to the site should be resurfaced, and funds made available to surrounding area for access such as dropped crossings.
- Due to previous poor management issues at CCFC, the Council should have an active role in how the site runs. Can a council committee be formed?

Planning Comments

42. The site, which extends to 12.3 hectares and is roughly triangular in shape, lies within the countryside and Green Belt on the north-eastern edge of the village of Sawston. It is located to the north of housing within Woodland Road and Broadmeadow and to the north-west of the Dales Manor Business Park, through which the site is accessed, whilst beyond the eastern boundary is a detached dwelling set in spacious grounds (North Farm). The site is bounded by open arable land to the north, north-east and north-west, and public rights of way run across this land.
43. Adjacent to the south-eastern boundary of the site is a presently disused parcel of land upon which there is an extant planning permission for the erection of 27 business units. This land is part of a larger site encompassing the northern part of the business park that is proposed to be allocated for housing (200 houses) in the Draft Local Plan. To the south of the site is a 4 hectare parcel of land that is within the applicant's ownership but does not form part of the application. This comprises a dense belt of trees between the site and housing in Woodland Road that is protected by a group Tree Preservation Order. This land also has a non-scheduled medieval moat at its western end.
44. The site is presently disused but, between 1977 and 1993, was used as an inert waste tip and has since become overgrown. The north-eastern and western

boundaries are defined by mature trees and vegetation. A former railway track runs within the site along the north-eastern boundary.

45. The application proposes a new 3,000 capacity football stadium and associated training and parking facilities for Cambridge City Football Club (CCFC), as well as a partially floodlit recreational ground to be gifted to Sawston Parish Council for use by the local community. The facilities for CCFC would be located at the northern end of the site (4.1 hectares), whilst the community recreation ground forms the southern part of the site (3.4 hectares). The application proposes an ancillary D1 use of the stadium to allow the facilities to be used for other purposes such as conferences and events when not in use by CCFC teams. Vehicular access to the site would be obtained via Grove Way and West Way off Babraham Road.

46. The proposal encompasses the following elements:

Main pitch

- A grass pitch with 15 metre high floodlights.
- Main stand (10.4m high) to the south-west side. Facilities within the main stand include a reception, bar/restaurant, team gym, changing rooms, first aid facilities, office space, food kiosk, boxes, 2 no. conference/event rooms, and storage.
- Covered spectator stands (4.775m high) to the remaining three sides of the pitch.
- Ticket office and shop (3.2m high).
- Grounds store (3.8m high).
- Equipment store (3.67m high).
- Materials for all above buildings to comprise grey metal panels for the walls and roof.
- 2 no. 3.2m high rendered turnstile structures.
- 3m high grey panel fencing to boundaries not enclosed by the stands.
- The main pitch would be used by the first team (men and women) and reserves, with matches held on Tuesday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays.
- The facilities within the main stand would be available for conferences/events/functions/weddings etc for the general public when not in use by CCFC.

Training pitch

- A 3G all-weather pitch with 15m high floodlights, surrounded by 4.5m high metal sports fencing.
- Building (8.2m high) comprising changing rooms for players and referees, office space, meeting room, kitchen and social area.
- Principal use for training purposes for all teams (on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings and Thursday mid-morning). The pitch could also be used for some matches for the boys, women's development and disabled teams, as well as for 1st team if weather prevents use of the main pitch.
- The pitch would be available for public hire when not in use by CCFC.

Associated facilities/development

- 500 parking spaces consisting of 263 hard-surfaced spaces and 237 soft-surfaced overflow spaces.
- 160 cycle spaces and 3 coach bays.
- CCFC site enclosed by 3m high green palisade security fencing (other than to north-east side).

Community land

- Partially floodlit grass pitch with 13.5m high low-intensity floodlights along the security fence.
- Access through security fence providing access to changing and washroom facilities within the building next to the training pitch.
- Parking for 12 cars.
- Land to be decontaminated, levelled and grassed before being gifted to the Parish Council.

Ancillary uses of the stadium and car park – these figures are estimates based on usage of the former Milton Road site:

- Car boot sales – 26 a year on Sundays (10am-2pm) – number of stalls would be limited to approximately 60 based on space available on the site.
- Weddings – 3 a year on Saturdays (2.30pm-11.30pm)
- Large conferences (100 people) – 6 a year on weekdays (10am-4pm)
- Large parties - 24 a year on Friday/Saturday evenings (7pm-11.30pm)
- Smaller conferences – 24 a year on weekdays (10am-4pm)

47. The information accompanying the application explains that CCFC was previously located in Milton Road, Cambridge, and experienced enforced demotion from the Conference South league at the end of 2007/8 as the stadium (which had a capacity of 2722) failed to meet the minimum FA requirements for playing in the Football Conference (minimum 3,000 capacity). The application argues that CCFC cannot therefore compete in the Conference South league unless a suitably sized stadium is found. It is stressed that the size of stadium applied for is in order to meet FA requirements and that the average attendance at matches over the last 10 years has been 338.
48. In 2012, planning permission was granted by Cambridge City Council to redevelop the Milton Road site for housing. The club was evicted from the ground at the end of the 2012-13 season, and has been sharing with Histon FC during the past season, although this has proven financially unviable and the club has been operating at a loss. The club has not been able to find any other sites within the city boundaries and has therefore had to consider out-of-town locations. In order to secure its survival, the supporting information explains that the ability to generate its own non-match day revenue, through alternative uses such as car-boot sales/conferences/weddings etc., is essential to the club.
49. The following reports have been submitted with the application:
- Planning statement
 - Design and access statement
 - Transport Assessment
 - Travel Plan
 - Landscape and visual impact assessment
 - Arboricultural impact assessment
 - Noise impact assessment
 - External lighting report
 - Air quality assessment
 - Community impact statement
 - Health impact and sustainability statement
 - Ecological assessment
 - Bat survey
 - Botanical survey

- Reptile & great crested newt survey
 - Flood Risk Assessment
 - Renewable energy statement
 - Water conservation strategy
 - Waste design guide toolkit
 - Site waste management plan
 - Foul sewage and utilities assessment
 - Phase I and II contamination assessments
50. The application has been amended in response to consultee comments to: reposition the stadium 10m further away from the northern boundary of the site; provide more retained/replanted trees in the gap between the stadium and northern boundary; and introduce an area of grassland to the south of the site for habitat creation. Additional biodiversity and traffic information and statements have also been provided.
51. An Environmental Impact Screening opinion was submitted last year, in response to which the Council concluded that an Environmental Impact Assessment would not be required.

Principle of development

52. The site lies outside the defined village framework for Sawston and within the countryside and Green Belt.
53. LDF Policy GB/1 contains a presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as defined within PPG2, which has since been superseded by the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF). Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that planning authorities should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt, with exceptions to this being:
- Buildings for agriculture and forestry;
 - Provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
 - The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
 - The replacement of a building, providing it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building, and providing the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
 - Limited infilling in villages and limited affordable housing to meet defined local needs;
 - Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.
54. The applicant's agent has expressed the view that the development qualifies against paragraph 89 by virtue of providing 'appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation'. The agent also states that, when compared to the now superseded

PPG17, the former wording 'small scale' has been replaced with the word 'appropriate' thereby meaning large-scale sporting developments can be permissible within the Green Belt.

55. Whilst development does not necessarily need to be small in scale to be considered appropriate in the Green Belt, it is clear that this proposal extends to more than the provision of a facility (such as a pavilion or changing rooms etc) solely designed to meet sporting needs. Whilst the stadium has been designed to meet FA requirements, it would also be operated as a business with the specific aim of generating as much income as possible for the club (through conferences, weddings, car-boot sales etc) when not in use by CCFC teams.
56. Notwithstanding the above, paragraph 89 also states that facilities for outdoor sport and recreation can only be deemed appropriate if they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves five purposes, two of which are to check the unrestricted sprawl of built-up areas and to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. As a result of the scale of the development, together with its siting on presently undeveloped land, the proposal would clearly conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and would fail to preserve the openness of the Green Belt.
57. The NPPF does allow for the development of previously developed land if it would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or the purpose of including land within it. The annex to the NPPF makes it clear that the definition of previously developed land excludes land that has been used for landfill purposes where provision for restoration has been made through development control procedures. The site was historically used for landfill purposes and the last permission relating to this use required the restoration of the site (S/2005/90/F), and it is not therefore considered to fall within the definition of previously developed land.
58. Notwithstanding this, as discussed above, the development is considered to conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and to have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and, hence, fails to comply with the NPPF and Policy GB/1 in this respect.
59. Officers consider the development would not fall within the list of exceptions to the general presumption against the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt. As a result, the scheme would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt which NPPF paragraph 87 states is harmful by definition and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
60. The information accompanying the application includes some examples of football stadia that have been permitted in Green Belt locations. However, there is no evidence in any of these decisions that such facilities were deemed to constitute appropriate development in the Green Belt, rather it was the very special circumstances that were considered to weigh in favour of the proposals referred to.
61. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF goes on to state that, when considering any application, planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt and that 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. It is therefore next necessary to consider whether the development results in any further harm in addition to that caused by inappropriateness.

Countryside Impact

62. Policy DP/7 of the 2007 Local Development Framework states that, outside village frameworks, only development for agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation and other uses that need to be located in the countryside will be permitted. The policy seeks to ensure the countryside is protected from gradual encroachment and to help guard against incremental growth in unsustainable locations. These two concerns are explored more fully below.

Visual impact and openness of the Green Belt

63. NPPF paragraph 79 states that openness is an essential characteristic of the Green Belt. The proposal would represent the encroachment of built development into an undeveloped area, resulting in the loss of an open area on the edge of the village and a significant reduction in the openness of the Green Belt.
64. The application includes landscape and arboricultural impact assessments. These describe the landscape quality within the site as being poor and consisting of overgrowth and self-set copses. It is proposed to clear the poorer quality self-set vegetation and to selectively thin some areas where trees are growing too close to each other and competing for light. It is proposed to retain much of the mature boundary trees and to carry out additional hedge and tree planting within the site including significant planting to reinforce the eastern boundary and to minimise light spillage from the floodlights.
65. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment explains that the site is bounded by mature trees and vegetation that range from 12m-30m in height and are predominantly taller than the proposed structures and floodlighting. The assessment acknowledges the site is visible in middle to long distance views (500m+) from Cambridge Road and from footpaths that cross the open countryside to the north but states that the substantial trees belts to the boundaries would prevent views into the site. As a result, it is argued the development would have no adverse visual impact within the landscape.
66. Contrary to the assertions within the submitted documentation, Officers consider the development would have a significant impact on the landscape. The mature trees bounding the site are deciduous trees and it is notable that the visual impact assessment was undertaken in July, a time of year when the structures would admittedly be generally well concealed from public view. During the winter months when the trees have lost their greenery, the development would be visible in middle-long distance views from the aforementioned footpaths and roads. Additionally, whilst the floodlights have been designed to be lower than the boundary trees and, as set out in the lighting assessment, to point downwards in order to minimise light spillage, the lighting would clearly have an adverse impact on the landscape during the winter months. The football season lasts from August-May and, throughout the daylight saving part of the year from October-March (a time of year when tree cover will provide nominal screening), floodlighting will be required for evening matches and training.
67. In summary, it is considered that the structures and the associated floodlighting would result in significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt and have a seriously adverse impact within the surrounding landscape.
68. Officers do not concur with the comments of Councillor Bard that the proposed residential allocations in Babraham Road, Sawston would have a more harmful

impact on the landscape than the development proposed within this application. Notwithstanding this, each application must be determined on its own merits.

69. The Local Plan is now at an advanced stage having been submitted for examination. The NPPF states that decision makers may give weight as a material consideration to relevant policies in emerging plans according to the stage of preparation, extent of unresolved objections and degree of consistency with the policies of the NPPF. Members should note that there have been objections to all of the allocation policies referred to. This affects the weight that can be given to the the proposed housing allocation at Dales Manor Industrial Estate. However, the industrial estate lies within the village framework of a Rural Centre and in principle redevelopment for residential use could come forward under the adopted development plan subject to consideration of the loss of employment use.

Residential amenity issues

70. The site lies in close proximity to residential properties located within Woodlands Road, Broadmeadow, Wakelin Avenue and Fairfields to the south, and a detached dwelling to the north-east (North Farm).
71. The application includes noise and lighting impact studies that assess the affect of the development on nearby residents. These explain that, in order to minimise disturbance to neighbouring dwellings, the artificial pitch has been positioned at the northern end of the site, as far away from the majority of residential properties as possible, and the home stand of the main stadium positioned to face away from residential properties. The associated floodlighting would point downwards across the pitches in order to prevent light spillage into surrounding residential properties.
72. The Environmental Health Officer has raised no in-principle objections to the impact of the proposed development upon existing residents, and considers that any adverse impacts can be mitigated through the following conditions:
- Restriction on hours of operation of the stadium and main car park to 7am-11pm Monday-Saturday and 9am-10pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays.
 - Details of plant and machinery.
 - Details of acoustic mitigation of the main stadium.
 - Floodlighting to the community land to be switched off at 10.30pm.
73. As well as the amenities of nearby residents, the Council also needs to be satisfied that the housing proposed on the adjacent land in the emerging local plan would not be prejudiced should consent be granted for the football stadium. The inclusion of such assessments within the noise and lighting reports was requested within the Council's pre-application response and also during the course of the application. Despite these requests, this information has not been forthcoming, with the applicant's consultant considering the provision of such detail to be unnecessary on the basis that the residential site is not yet built and therefore has no current expectation on noise climate. Nevertheless, Officers have explored this issue further with the EHO who is satisfied that the impact of noise from the stadium itself would, subject to further details on acoustic mitigation, be acceptable. The main concern would relate to late night noise disturbance arising from the use of the car parking area and, in particular, the access road, which passes both close to existing housing and in extremely close proximity to the proposed housing site.
74. In response to concerns raised by the Parish Council, the applicants have confirmed their agreement to a cut-off time of 11.45pm for non-football events. However, given

the concerns raised by EHO, should Members be minded to grant consent, it is recommended that this should be conditional on an 11pm cut-off time. Should any extension beyond these hours be required, the applicants would need to submit further detailed information to assess the impact of late-night usage of the car park and access on existing and potential future residents.

75. Sawston Parish Council has expressed concern about the impact of the proposed car-boot sales and has requested these be restricted to the hours of 10am-2pm for Sunday car-boot sales with no set-up before 9am. CCFC has confirmed its agreement to such a restriction being imposed should permission be granted for the proposal.
76. With regards to lighting issues, the EHO has raised no objections to the impact on nearby residents providing the lighting to the community ground would be switched off by 10.30pm. In addition to this, CCFC has confirmed it would be in agreement to a condition requiring floodlights to be turned off 30 minutes after each game.
77. In summary, it is considered that the stadium would have some adverse impact upon the amenities of surrounding residents (both existing and potential future residents) but that these impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions.

Highway safety, car parking and cycle parking

78. A Transport Assessment (TA) has been submitted with the application. This states that, whilst the proposed stadium has a capacity of 3000, the average number of fans attending matches over the last 10 years is 338, whilst there have only been 5 occasions when attendance exceeded 1000, with the greatest number being 1915 on an exceptional FA Cup match day. Currently around 150 cars attend per match. A TA has been submitted which considers the impact of an average attendance of 338 up to a worst-case scenario of the stadium reaching maximum capacity.
79. The TA considers the impact of the development in terms of the proposed means of access to the site as well as in relation to wider highways network. Surveys have been undertaken at a number of key junctions in the area, including the signalled crossroads at Babraham Road/New Road/Cambridge Road and the A1307/Babraham High Street. The submitted report concludes that the junctions operate well within capacity and that the traffic associated would be generally off-peak and would therefore have no impact on local junctions during peak hours.
80. The Local Highways Authority and New Communities Officers at the County Council initially raised concerns about the development, requesting further clarification and information in relation to: pedestrian and cycle routes to the site and potential conflict with HGV traffic; the impact of events such as weddings and conferences; accident analysis requirement; clarification of methodology used for mode split data, attendance figures and parking calculation; mitigation to be put in place to prevent supporters parking in nearby residential streets.
81. Strong concerns have been raised by Babraham Parish Council that the development would result in a high level of traffic through the village, which would be used as a rat-run between the A1307 and the football ground. Local residents have also expressed concern that the development could result in people parking in nearby residential streets.

82. There have been significant ongoing discussions with the Highways and New Communities Officers and additional supporting information and surveys provided. Whilst the details are still being negotiated, the following mitigation measures have been agreed as being sufficient to resolve the Highways Authority's concerns.
- A 2.5m wide footway to be provided along the entire length of the left hand side of Grove Road between Babraham Road and the site. This should be designed to prevent conflict between cars and pedestrians and the precise details are still being discussed between the applicants and Highways Authority.
 - Prevention of charges for parking to be secured through a Section 106 Agreement in order to prevent people parking in surrounding streets.
 - Funding towards the signalised junction: contribution to be required should attendances exceed 1,000 on 5 or more occasions a year, exact amount to be clarified by the Highways Authority.
 - Provision of an on-road advisory cycle lane on Babraham Road between Grove Road and the Babraham Road/New Road crossroads.
83. The application proposes the provision of 500 parking spaces in total, consisting of 263 hard-surfaced spaces and 237 soft-surfaced overflow spaces. This level of parking provision is designed to meet the needs of the stadium if operating at capacity. In addition, 157 cycle spaces are proposed to be provided in accordance with the Council's standards. Due to the current average attendance of 338, the agent considers this to be an over-provision, and has requested that consideration be given to providing a set number at the outset, and for additional spaces to be provided at set trigger points should attendances increase in the future. Officers would be agreeable to this approach and willing to apply conditions accordingly should the application be supported by Members.
84. As discussed earlier in this report, the Council needs to be satisfied the development would not prejudice the adjacent site coming forward for housing in the future should it be adopted as part of the new Local Plan. The Highways Authority considers the combined traffic flows of the proposed development and possible additional housing to be acceptable given that the peak flows associated with each would occur at different times of the day. If this proposal were to be considered favourably, the implications of access through the middle of the residential allocation would need to be given further consideration to ensure that access for the level and nature of traffic, including coaches, would not prejudice the delivery of a successful residential environment.
85. Councillor Bard has suggested that, in order to minimise the impact of the development on the adjacent proposed residential site, consideration should be given to providing an alternative means of access around the edge of the business park. Given the significant additional cost this would involve, this could only be justified if the impacts of the proposed access route had been deemed unacceptable on highway safety on neighbour amenity grounds.
86. In summary, whilst the development would result in additional traffic to and from the site, it is considered this can be satisfactorily mitigated through the imposition of conditions and a Section 106 Agreement.

Sustainability and sustainable transport issues

87. A Travel Plan has been submitted that outlines the following measures to promote sustainable travel:

- Public bus – the nearest bus stop is located 800m from site and has regular bus services running every 20 minutes – 1 hour throughout the day (Citi 7).
- Park and ride available at Babraham Road and Trumpington. The latter is on the Citi 7 bus route.
- Trains – nearest train stations are at Great Shelford and Whittlesford.
- CCFC shuttle bus – on match days, a shuttle bus running to and from Babraham Park & Ride and Shelford and Whittlesford railway stations to the ground is proposed, with frequency of services dependent on demand.
- Cycle – the site is accessible by cycle with access tracks from Addenbrookes (through Shelford and Stapleford) and from Babraham.
- Provision of information on travel opportunities to the site would be provided to supporters and staff in order to encourage car-sharing and public transport use.

88. The measures within the Travel Plan can be secured through the completion of a Section 106 Legal Agreement. However, a commitment to promote sustainable means of travel is no guarantee that people will choose to travel by such means. A football stadium is a use that will attract users and visitors from a wide area. Whilst it would be possible to travel to the stadium by public transport, they are not likely to be viewed as convenient or attractive options for those with access to a car. The Citi 7 bus from Cambridge via Trumpington Park & Ride to Sawston is a regular service (albeit only hourly in the evenings) but the nearest bus stop from the entrance to the site for southbound services is 1100m away from the site and, for northbound services, 1300m from the site. Alternatively, people could catch a train to Whittlesford or Great Shelford stations, or drive to Babraham Park and Ride, from where it is proposed to provide a shuttle bus to the ground. Due to the inconvenience of the other options, as well as the ease of (free) parking at the site, it is likely most supporters would choose to travel by car.
89. With regards to the proposed alternative ancillary uses of the stadium and the adjacent community land, Officers consider the site is not in a very accessible location for the local population for such a facility. In addition, the access to the site is currently through an industrial estate and unlikely to be perceived as attractive to pedestrians and cyclists, particularly during the evening hours, albeit this would change if the proposed housing allocation is implemented.
90. As a result, Officers consider the proposal for a major sporting facility would result in an unsustainable form of development by attracting unsustainable forms of travel to and from the site.

Ecology

91. The Ecology Officer initially raised strong concerns regarding the ecological implications of the development and the appropriateness of the site in principle. Following these objections, a further bat survey and breeding bird survey have been undertaken and a Preliminary Ecological Management Plan submitted.
92. Comments from the Ecology Officer following these additional surveys are currently awaited and will be reported in an update or verbally at a meeting. It is understood from recent discussions with the Ecology Officer that the additional surveys have resolved the original in-principle objection to the development of the site and that, whilst the preference would be to retain the site in its present form, that the impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated against through habitat management and enhancement measures.

Flood risk and contamination

93. The site is located on top of a known historic landfill site for inert waste and former railway land and also overlies a principal aquifer. The responses from the Environment Agency and Contaminated Land Officer make it clear that any harmful impacts can be controlled through planning conditions.

Archaeology

94. The site lies within an area of known archaeological interest including a non-scheduled medieval moat within the woodland to the south. However, given the former use of the site for landfill purposes, the County Council's Archaeology Officer considers the archaeological value of the site itself to be negligible and has therefore raised no objections to the development.

Water conservation and renewable energy

95. The submitted report explains that water conservation would be achieved by constructing a rainwater collection system from the roof areas which would then be pumped through a sprinkler to serve the main pitch. Such measures can be secured by condition in the event planning permission is granted.
96. The renewable energy statement proposes the use of solar panels that would exceed the 10% renewable energy requirement. The submitted report is based on pre-construction figures and, if the scheme is approved, a condition would be needed requiring details of a final scheme.

Impact on local facilities

97. Significant concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the development on Sawston Village College's (SVC) ability to generate revenue and to secure funding towards upgrading of sporting facilities.
98. This issue relates to competition and is not a material planning consideration. However, CCFC has sought to address the concerns raised. Sport England has advised that being the only public sport facility in the community is just one of a number of factors to be taken into account in assessing eligibility for funding and that there are other funding streams that could be applied for. As such, the development is unlikely to compromise the Village College's chance of securing funding in the future.
99. In response to concerns raised by SVC at the pre-application stage, CCFC has advised that the gym in the stadium would be for player and staff use only, and not for public hire.
100. In response to concerns raised by Sawston Girls FC, CCFC has advised it only recruits from Cambridge schools. As a compromise, it has offered not to relocate the girls team to Sawston for training or matches whilst playing in the same league as Sawston girls, and has also made a commitment not to recruit players from any of the Sawston schools or colleges.

Very special circumstances

101. In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the development is also considered to result in harm by virtue of the loss of openness of the Green Belt, unacceptable visual impact on the landscape, and by resulting in an unsustainable form of development. It is therefore necessary to consider the justification put forward by the

applicant's agent in support of the proposal and the extent to which these amount to 'very special circumstances' This justification is set out and considered below:

a) The need for the development

102. CCFC was previously located in Milton Road, Cambridge. The club experienced enforced demotion from the Conference South league from its former ground in Milton Road as the stadium failed to meet the minimum FA requirements for playing in the Football Conference (minimum 3,000 capacity). CCFC can't therefore compete in the Conference South league (this is the next league up from the league the club are presently playing in) unless a suitably sized stadium is found.
103. The club has a number of teams (a first team, reserve mens, two womens, two disabled, six girls, one boys and boys development centre) and has achieved the FA Charter Standard Award reflecting the quality of academy at the club. The development would secure the future of a semi-professional football team for players and fans, and the future of all other associated teams.
104. In 2012, planning permission was granted by Cambridge City Council to redevelop the Milton Road site for housing and the club was evicted from the ground at the end of the 2012-13 season. The redevelopment of the former ground to provide a larger stadium is not therefore an option.
105. CCFC has been sharing with Histon FC during the past season. The application states that this has proven to be financially unviable, with the club experiencing a deficit of £100,000 over the last year. In order to secure its survival, it is argued that the ability of the club to generate its own non-match day revenue, through alternative uses such as car-boot sales/conferences/weddings etc, is essential. A ground-sharing arrangement means that the club would have to rely solely on turnstile takings and match-day advertising. The average attendance at matches for the last three years has been 338. Unless the club experienced a dramatic upturn in fortunes and gate receipts, this precarious financial situation would continue and, ultimately, could result in the demise of the club.
106. During pre-application discussions with the Council, CCFC was asked to consider the possibility of sharing a Community Stadium, a number of possible sites for which were being considered at the time within the draft Local Plan. Whilst the Community Stadium has not been pursued further within the Local Plan, the possibility of sharing the stadium was explored by CCFC at the time but discounted for the same reasons set out above, namely the unviability of a ground-sharing arrangement.
107. Data informing the Local Plan identifies a need for an all-weather pitch in the District. The proposed 3G pitch will fulfil this need and the application questions how this need will be satisfied if not here.

b) No other suitable site available

108. The club has been searching for a new ground for the last 10 years. Initially, its aim was to find a suitable site within the City but, due to planning restrictions and high land values, has been unable to do so. The lack of available sites within the City was acknowledged by the City Council when granting consent to redevelop the Milton Road site for housing.
109. As a result, the club has been forced to consider out of town locations for a new ground and, due to the tight Green Belt boundary around Cambridge and the scale of

land required to accommodate the development, this has meant Green Belt locations have had to be considered. Similar exceptional circumstances have been accepted elsewhere in the country as worthy of allowing large-scale sporting developments in the Green Belt.

110. The application includes a sequential analysis of over 25 sites that have been considered and deemed unsuitable for a number of reasons. It is argued the site represents the most viable site option available. The club's requirements consist of: a minimum site area of 6.8 hectares, preferably within 4 miles (maximum 8 miles) from the City, close to a railway station (preferably within 2 miles but up to 3.1 miles), preferably easy access to road network, unimpeded site access, good access to public transport, long-term financial viability, and preferably local support for the proposal. A full list of sites considered is included with the application but can be summarised as follows:

- A number of sites in Newmarket, Linton, Papworth, Swavesey and Longstanton were automatically discounted for being too far from Cambridge and failing to meet the minimum size criteria.
- University Rugby Club – unwilling to ground share.
- Cambridge Rugby Club – would involve ground sharing, which is financially unviable, also no local support.
- Cowley Road – City Council was unable to make a commitment to the club and the relocation of the sewage works would make the scheme financially unviable.
- NIAB – no interest from the developer.
- Milton – site also in Green Belt and no Parish Council support for the proposal.
- Spicers – site access compromised by train track and level crossing.

c) Community benefits

111. The application would accord with the NPPF, which states that 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. Sawston has an identified shortfall of 5 hectares of recreation space. Local football teams have referred to current problems with a lack of playing pitches, lack of changing facilities and time restrictions on the use of pitches. The development proposes the change of use of 3.4 hectares of land that would be gifted to Sawston Parish Council for community recreation use, and would go some way towards redressing this shortfall.

112. The 2009 Community Facilities Assessment states Sawston is actively looking for a new village hall location, and the stadium could offer suitable facilities for community events and meetings etc. There is currently no comparable venue in Sawston. The development would also benefit local businesses, through the provision of conference facilities and meeting rooms, and local shops and businesses (pubs, sandwich shops etc) by bringing people into the village to use these facilities before and after matches.

113. The development would contribute towards the health and well-being of the community through the provision of recreation space and a sporting facility but also through community projects such as football training at schools, work experience placements, health tours, inspirational talks and advertising health and lifestyle choices.

d) Site benefits

114. It is argued the development would comply with paragraph 81 of the NPPF, which requires authorities to plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of defined Green Belt, in the following ways:

- Biodiversity enhancement – current habitat quality is poor, and the scheme includes mitigation measures to improve the habitat.
- Landscape enhancement – the site is overgrown and poor in landscape quality. The scheme includes significant new landscaping.
- The development would bring a redundant former landfill site back into beneficial use. The land requires significant work (decontamination and levelling) to bring it back into use and this is only likely to happen with considerable investment.

e) Economic benefits

115. CCFC employs 27 people (mostly part-time) and the development would therefore secure the retention of these local jobs. The development would also provide employment during the construction period.

f) Support for the proposal

116. A petition was carried out of fans, and 271 signatures of support were received. The proposal is also supported by the Parish Council, local sporting clubs and many local residents. The volume of local support for the proposal is argued to constitute a significant factor in favour of the development.

g) Sustainable access

117. A regular bus service, and nearby rail links and park and ride sites, mean it would be possible take the public bus, shuttle bus, or walk or cycle to the ground.

118. Only 26% of existing supporters live in the city and only 8% would have to travel further. It is argued that, due to Cambridge traffic, travel may be more convenient for many fans.

Officer assessment of the ‘very special circumstances’

119. The need for a 3,000 capacity (a Category B) stadium to satisfy the necessary FA requirements to enable it to move up to the Conference South league has been confirmed within the responses received from both the Cambridgeshire FA and Sport England. The Conference South is the league above the level at which the club plays (the Calor League Premier Division), and the league to which CCFC would move up to should they secure promotion. This season, the club finished third and qualified for the play-offs, although did not progress beyond the semi-final stage of the play-offs, so will remain in the current league for at least another season.

120. The application is not therefore designed to meet an existing need, rather to satisfy a potential need should the club finish high enough to secure promotion in the future. There is obviously no guarantee this will ever occur but, equally, it would be difficult to conclude that promotion is unlikely to happen sometime soon particularly given how close the club has come to doing so this and in previous seasons. If CCFC were to remain in their existing league, they would still need to provide a 1,950 seat capacity stadium (a Category C stadium) as Histon FC has at present. However, it would make

no sense for the club to plan a stadium of such a size given that it would prevent the club from securing promotion in the future.

121. The application includes financial information to demonstrate that ground-sharing has proven to be unviable, and that the club has operated at a loss of £100,000 over the course of the last season whilst sharing with Histon FC. During pre-application discussions, the applicant was also asked to consider the possibility of sharing a Community Stadium, a number of sites for which were being considered at the time in the Draft Local Plan. Whilst the rental terms being suggested at the time by Grosvenor Estates were not overly onerous, the submitted information it is estimated the club would still have experienced a loss of £60,000 per year as it would have to rely on match-day takings alone and would not be able to generate its own non-match day revenue.
122. On this basis of the above, the provision of a 3,000 capacity stadium is consistent with the club's aspirations for progression up the football leagues.
123. Whilst the need is accepted, it is still necessary to consider whether this amounts to the very special circumstances required to justify development of this particular site in the Green Belt. CCFC has been aware since 2005 that its former ground in Milton Road was likely to be developed for housing, and has been searching for a new ground ever since. Due to high land values in the city centre, as well as the lack of available land in the city to accommodate a facility of the size required (a fact acknowledged by the case officer in the planning committee report relating to the redevelopment of CCFC's former ground for housing), this has inevitably resulted in CCFC looking at sites located outside the city.
124. It is regrettable that, as soon as the club realised it would need to look outside the city, it did not approach the District Council for assistance, as a facility of this scale should ideally be properly planned for and allocated through the local plan process. Indeed, the proposal was raised and a special single-issue consultation at the Issues and Options stage of the Local Plan was undertaken. The consultation showed more objection than support for the proposal and Sawston Parish Council raised a number of concerns, and it was concluded that a football stadium should not be included in the Proposed Submission Local Plan. No representations were received objecting to the exclusion of the proposal in the Local Plan from the applicants, who instead chose to make this application. Before considering development in the Green Belt, particularly in an unsustainable location as this is deemed to be, the Council would need to be fully satisfied that there are no alternative brownfield sites or non-Greenbelt land available that would meet the club's needs.
125. The application includes a sequential analysis of alternative sites considered. Key criteria that have been identified by the club include: a minimum site area of 6.8 hectares; proximity to the city centre (preferably within 4 miles but up to 8 miles), and proximity to a railway station (preferably 2 miles but within 3.1 miles, which represents up to an hour's walking pace). It is notable that, at 8.8 miles away, the site falls outside the outer limit of the club's search area whilst, at 2.8 miles away, the nearest railway station is further away than desired. The site therefore falls short of the club's own search criteria.
126. Officers are not satisfied in this instance that the consideration of alternative sites is sufficiently robust and thorough. For example, an application in 2012 for a 5,000 capacity stadium in the Green Belt in the London Borough of Bromley, notes that the club (Cray Wanderers FC) identified a zone within two miles of their original site (in order to encourage good attendance at matches) and that a press advert was put out

in an effort to try and identify a suitable site within this search zone. There is no evidence that such efforts have been made in this instance. Officers are not satisfied there has been a proper consideration of alternatives, and this is evidenced by the fact the site was purchased by the club prior to engaging in pre-application discussions with the Council and that no assessment of alternative sites was provided or put forward by the club at this pre-application stage.

127. The application cites numerous examples of football clubs that have relocated away from their historic grounds in town/city centres to locations in the countryside and Green Belt. This includes, for example, a new 22,000 capacity stadium for Brighton FC and, on a smaller scale, a new stadium for Bury Town on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds. To constitute 'very special circumstances' means there needs to be a unique and exceptional set of factors relating to each case that clearly weighs in its favour. As each application is assessed on its own merits, it cannot be accepted that decisions elsewhere establish a precedent to allow this particular development on Green Belt land.
128. The justification put forward states that the provision of 3.4 hectares of recreational land that would be gifted to the Parish Council would contribute towards redressing the 5 hectare shortfall of recreation land identified in studies informing the Local Plan. Officers accept this would be a benefit of the proposal and one that could be secured through the completion of a Community Use Agreement. However, as outlined in the consideration of sustainable transport issues above, this additional recreation land would not be situated in an easily accessible location for the majority of the local population. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that this is the only way that this need could be achieved. As such, it is considered that only moderate weight can be afforded to this benefit.
129. The application also argues the gifted recreation land could go some way towards meeting the needs of the nearby proposed residential sites should these come forward in the emerging local plan. However, these sites would generate their own needs that would be secured through Section 106 Agreements.
130. The applicant's case refers to the benefits the development would bring to the community. Officers concur that studies informing the local plan point to the need for a village hall and are aware from responses received and information provided with the application that the provision of conference facilities and meeting rooms in the area would be welcomed by local businesses. However, there is no evidence to suggest these uses have been specifically designed to meet genuine community needs. Instead, they would be viewed as a means to generate the maximum possible income for the club in order to ensure its commercial success. As these facilities would be run as commercial ventures, it is also unclear whether they would be financially accessible to the local community. This is unlike, for instance, the facilities provided by the Village College that are operated on a not-for-profit basis.
131. The stated community benefits refer to the fact that the club has a number of football teams in addition to the men's first team at junior, youth and adult levels. It also engages with schools and actively promotes healthy lifestyles in the community. This argument is entirely reliant on the club's willingness and desire to continue to engage with the community in such a manner. There are no mechanisms by which the Council could guarantee or secure this, and this factor cannot therefore be afforded significant weight.
132. The application argues that the proposal would bring forward biodiversity and landscape enhancements. These issues are discussed earlier in the report. In

summary, Officers consider that, from a biodiversity perspective, it would be preferable to retain the site in its current form and that the stated 'enhancements' are required to mitigate against the harmful aspects caused by the development. Similarly, landscaping would be necessary in order to go some way towards ameliorating the harm caused by the development. Neither can be considered to constitute justification weighing in favour of the development.

133. The applicant's agent questions how the Local Planning Authority would plan positively for the beneficial use of this land (in accordance with NPPF paragraph 81) should the application be refused. However, Officers consider it unrealistic to assume that the Council needs to designate a specific use for every single piece of land in the Green Belt. Arguably, the greatest value in Green Belt land can lie in protecting it in its current form for its own sake, in order to achieve its stated aims of retaining openness and protecting the countryside from encroachment. It is therefore not accepted that the Council must demonstrate an alternative appropriate use if it intends to refuse this application.
134. In summary, officers acknowledge that there would be some benefits to the wider community by retaining the club and some benefits to the local community by redressing some of the shortfall in recreation provision in the locality (albeit in a poorly accessible location). However, it is considered these benefits, whether taken individually or collectively, would not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt caused by reason of inappropriateness, as well the additional harm identified in this report. The recommendation is therefore one of refusal.
135. Should Members be minded to support the application, it would need to be referred to the Secretary of State in accordance with the Consultation Direction 2009. There will also be a need to agree a full list of conditions and the requirements of any Section 106 agreement.

Recommendation

136. Refusal, for the following reasons:
 1. The site lies outside the defined village framework for Sawston, and within the countryside and Cambridge Green Belt. The proposed development, by virtue of the nature and range of proposed uses, together with the scale of the facility and its consequent failure to preserve the openness of the Green Belt, would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as defined within the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 ('the NPPF 2012'), and would therefore be contrary to Policy GB/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework 2007 ('the LDF').
 2. Notwithstanding the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the development would result in additional harm to the rural character of the area and to the openness of the Green Belt. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policy DP/3 (m) of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007, which states that development will not be permitted if it would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside and landscape character.
 3. Notwithstanding the harm by reason of inappropriateness, the site is in a location that would result in unsustainable forms of travel for the proposed use. Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policies DP/1 and TR/1 of the adopted Local Development Framework 2007, which state that development will only be permitted if it would be consistent with the principles of sustainable

development by, in part, minimising the need to travel and reducing car dependency.

4. Insufficient very special circumstances, including the lack of a sufficiently robust and detailed consideration of alternative sites, have been put forward to demonstrate why the harm, by reason of inappropriateness in the Green Belt and other harm identified above, is clearly outweighed by these considerations. The application therefore fails to satisfy the requirements of paragraph 88 of the NPPF 2012.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website and / or an indication as to where hard copies can be inspected.

- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy (adopted January 2007)
- Planning File Ref: S/2239/13/FL
- Documents referred to in the report including appendices on the website only and reports to previous meetings

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