

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

13 May 2015

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number: S/2781/14/FL

Parish(es): Girton

Proposal: Multi-use games area with fencing and floodlights

Site address: Gretton School, Manor Farm Road

Applicant(s): Cavendish Education

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Key material considerations: Principle (including Green Belt), residential amenity, highway safety and other matters

Committee Site Visit: Yes

Departure Application: No

Presenting Officer: Debra Bell

Application brought to Committee because: The recommendation of Girton Parish Council conflicts with the Officers recommendation of approval.

Date by which decision due: 21 January 2015

1. Planning History

2. An application for a Multi-use games area with fencing and floodlights was withdrawn in 2014 (ref: **S/1466/14/FL**) due to the absence of a detailed Lighting Assessment, Ecology Assessment and details of hours of operation.
3. **S/0931/10/F** – Change of use from class D1 (Non-Residential Institution) to Class C2/D1 Mixed Residential/Non-Residential School for Pupils with Special Educational Needs – Approved.
4. **S/1617/09/F** - Change of use from Class C2 (residential institutions) to Class D1 (non-residential institutions) retrospective application – Approved.

Planning Policies

5. **National**
National Planning Policy Framework

6. **Local Development Core Strategy 2007:**
ST/6 Group Villages
7. **National**
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
8. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Core Strategy DPD, 2007:**
ST/1 Green Belt
9. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Development Control Policies DPD, 2007:**
DP/1 Sustainable Development
DP/2 Design of New Development
DP/3 Development Criteria
DP/7 Development Frameworks
GB/1 Development in the Green Belt
GB/2 Mitigating the Impact of Development Adjoining the Green Belt
GB/5 Recreation in the Green Belt
NE/6 Biodiversity
NE/14 Lighting Proposals
NE/15 Noise Pollution
CH/5 Conservation Areas
10. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):**
District Design Guide SPD
Trees and Development Sites SPD
Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD
11. **Proposed Submission Local Plan**
S/10 Group Villages
S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
HQ/1 Design Principles
NH/4 Biodiversity
NH/10 Recreation in the Green Belt
NH/14 Heritage Assets
SC/10 Lighting Proposals
SC/11 Noise Pollution
TI/9 Education facilities

Consultations

12. **Girton Parish Council – 15/1/15** The Council approves the application only on the basis of the following conditions being applied: 1) A decision should be deferred until a satisfactory noise assessment is provided. 2) A curfew of 8.30pm for use of the facility should be in place throughout the year. 3) The concerns of residents regarding noise, light pollution and the possibility of the facility being let out to other users are echoed by the Council.
13. **Updated Girton Parish Council Comments - 5/3/15** The Council voted against the application. The noise report was felt inadequate and the Council would ask officers for a noise report comparable with that for the Howes Place Sports Field application. The Council would like another sound survey to be taken, and for all activity on the MUGA itself to cease by 8.30pm as promised by the school's owner.

14. **Environmental Health** – 19/12/14 Raised no objections to the development and commented that a noise report was not applicable in this instance as there is an established use on the land for sports activities and that there are existing noise barriers in the form of buildings between the proposed development and the nearest residential properties to the South-West.
15. **Updated Environmental Health Comments** – 28/4/15 No further objections and commented – ‘The noise report submitted with the application is of little use in assessing the noise produced from the facility as it only gives background levels around the site. It is accepted that noise from such activities is difficult to assess due to lack of specific guidance relating to such use. If the MUGA is used for hockey matches, impact noise will be higher than for other ball games. Additionally, distances were quoted as being from the centre of the pitch. Other studies have shown that noise is generally, consistent throughout and is more appropriate to measure from the side-lines where spectators will be located.
16. Provided the lighting is installed in accordance with the submitted scheme it is unlikely a nuisance will be caused. I would recommend a post installation test be carried out by a competent person to ensure the isolux levels predicted are actually being met and adjustments made if necessary. Whilst lighting is likely to be visible from nearby houses, it will not cause a nuisance by shining directly inside if installed as designed.
17. Due to the nature of the facility, noise and lighting impacts are difficult to moderate apart from the introduction of time limits.
18. In this case I believe the times being offered for use i.e. 9am to 8.30pm are acceptable and a condition restricting use to these times would be beneficial.
19. Impacts may be noticeable at nearby residential premises, but these need to be considered against the benefits of the provision of such a facility and its use will not be in sufficient proximity or of sufficient duration to create a statutory nuisance at nearby residential premises.
20. **Cambridgeshire County Council, Historic Environment Team** – No objections and commented – Our records indicate that the site lies in an area of high archaeological potential. To the North West is evidence of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Medieval occupation (ECB2864, MCB13219, MCB13220). Whilst the south is a series of medieval earthworks (MCB13000, MCB1321) and it is thought that similar remains may be located within the bounds of the application area.
21. We do not object to development from proceeding in this location but consider that the site should be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation secured through the inclusion of a negative condition.
22. This will secure the preservation of the archaeological interest of the area either by record or in situ as appropriate.
23. **Landscaping** – Comments will be included in an update report or reported at the meeting.
24. **Ecology Officer** – The application is now supported by an ecological assessment. The assessment has been considered, and given a view, with regard to; bats, breeding birds, reptiles and great crested newts. It should be noted that the assessment has considered the entire site and appears to have given an overview of

the entire site's potential future development and re-use of buildings, however the application which is currently lodged is for a relatively small parcel of land which has been described as being of negligible value to biodiversity given its current use is as amenity grassland.

25. With regard to bats, there are no roosting areas within the application site. The floodlights may result in some light spill extending 40m this would only take it to the edge of the semi-natural habitats and is not considered to be significant. Furthermore, this could be mitigated by some new tree planting just inside the semi-natural area.
26. With regard to great crested newts, the assessment draws attention to the fact that GCN may use the nearby pond for breeding and that they could find shelter in the area of semi-natural habitat. However, GCN are not likely to shelter in the amenity grassland and it is my view that the development should impose the best working practice contained within the assessment to avoid any likely harm.
27. A condition should be imposed to control the placement and storage of materials and contractors welfare facilities to land enclosed with the redline boundary. Reason: to control the storage of materials so that areas of semi-natural habitat remain undisturbed through the course of the development.
28. With regard to reptiles, the assessment draws attention to the fact that reptiles may use the nearby semi-natural habitat. However, reptiles are not likely to shelter in the amenity grassland and it is my view that the development should impose the best working practice contained within the assessment to avoid any likely harm.
29. With regard to breeding birds, no breeding birds are likely to be found within the amenity grassland. Thus no impact is protected.
30. I would advise that an informative is added to any consent to the wording of, "Development at the site has been assessed by MKA Ecology Limited who in their report have drawn attention to the wider parts of the school site to provide habitat for protected species including breeding birds, roosting bats, great crested newts and potentially reptiles. Any persons undertaking work with the site should be aware of the potential ecological constraints and take the appropriate course of action as recommended by MKA Ecology limited in the report "Gretton School, Girton - Preliminary Ecological Assessment and bat Inspection Survey".

Representations

31. Letters have been received from the occupiers of No's **6, 8, 15,18, 23 Churchfield Court, 100 High Street** – Objecting to the proposals on the following grounds:
 - a) The installation of floodlighting would cause considerable light pollution to close residential properties and retirement home and would allow extended use of the facility throughout the year. The applicant has stated that the flood lights will be switched off at 8:30pm and the site would be cleared by 9pm. However this would not preclude the use of the site up to 10:30pm and beyond in the summer months when flood lights are not required.
 - b) Increased noise pollution resulting from the development impacting on local residents. Multi-purpose play areas are notoriously noisy areas due to the use of whistles, the loud shouting of both players and their supporters, which is often accompanied by foul language over which the applicant will have no control.

c) The encroachment on the Green Belt is not justifiable as the games area will be used not only for recreational purposes, as claimed but also for commercial gain as was clear from discussions between the school and its neighbours at the meeting of 4 November.

d) Increase in traffic to and from the site causing further parking issues.

e) Inaccurate assessment of ambient noise in the noise assessment.

f) No objections to the installation of the games area itself, just the afterhours use and floodlights.

g) The ground plan submitted does not accurately show the full extent of the woods bordering the applicant's site. Also it does not show the conservatories and bay windows on the rear of properties in Churchfield Court, which would be badly affected by noise and light pollution should this application be allowed.

32. Pipe House, Lupton Road, Oxon (Leaseholder Churchfield Court) – My company is the freeholder and manager of the leasehold retirement development known as Churchfield Court, adjacent to the application site. In this capacity, I made comments on the original application and note the changes proposed on the current application.

33. In my previous comments, I made an observation about restricting the night time lighting to an acceptable time in the evening. I note from the application and following a public consultation that it is proposed to have a winter cut off time of 8.30, with the area cleared by 9.00pm. However, no proposals have been made for the summer period where it is light beyond 9.00pm and play could continue beyond this time without lighting. This does not seem reasonable and I have been approached by a number of our residents to ask that this point is addressed.

34. There is little concern that the facility is used for school purposes, but much more on the basis that extended hours will imply a more commercial use, with all that implies on noise and disturbance.

35. At the least we would ask that a restriction on finishing time is applied all year round at the same time of 8.30pm.

Site and Proposal

36. The site comprises a school with its built form defining the northern tip of the Girton village development framework, with playing fields and car parking area within the Green Belt to the north and east. The site for the MUGA falls just outside the village framework in the countryside and within the designated Green Belt and benefits from a treed boundary to the north and East. The site is separated from the nearest residential properties by a disused pool building and bungalow to the South.

37. The area to be developed is currently used and maintained as a grassed sports pitch for the school and has at some point been illuminated, this is evidenced by the number of wooden poles and existing floodlights surrounding the area.

38. The application proposes an all-weather pitch, multi-use games area (MUGA), the surface will be rubber synthetic grass carpet enclosed by 3m high dark green fencing, with 4 no. 8m high dark green coated steel columns with floodlights mounted on top. This is a revised scheme and has moved the MUGA further away from the shared boundary; giving a distance of 60m from the wall of the closest

residential property (100 High Street), and 40m from the garden boundary; and 77m from the rear garden boundary of 16 Churchfield Court.

Planning Considerations

Principle of development (including Green Belt)

39. The key issues for consideration in this instance are whether the proposed development is appropriate development by definition in the Green Belt; whether the proposal will result in any harm to the Green Belt; residential amenity; landscape impact; highway safety; lighting; ecology; archaeology and any other matters
40. The proposed development provides facilities for outdoor recreation and therefore when considered with the provisions of paragraphs 89 and 90 of the NPPF the main consideration in determining whether the proposed development represents inappropriate development is whether it preserves the openness of the Green Belt.
41. The proposals are located close to the existing school buildings and facilities and although there will be some impact on the openness of the Green Belt with the floodlights and fencing, the MUGA will be well related to the adjacent buildings on the edge of a much larger open area of land. Therefore officers have given the view that the development does not impact sufficiently on the openness of the Green Belt and in this case the development is not considered to be inappropriate by definition.
42. The aims of Policy GB/5 of the LDF are to encourage proposals in the Green Belt which provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, appropriate to the Green Belt, where it would not harm the objectives of the Green Belt a recreational use is considered to be appropriate within the Green Belt.

Any other harm to the Green Belt

43. Officers are of the view that the development with its all-weather pitch, fencing and floodlighting will still maintain the openness of this particular section of the Green Belt and although the wider visual impact of the lighting columns will be limited there will be an increased impact when the flood lights are in use.
44. The applicant accepts the need for a restriction on the hours of use of the floodlights and given the time restrictions and the ability to control the type and direction of the lighting to limit light spill, officers are of the view that the time limits further reduce the potential impact on the Green Belt to an acceptable degree.

Residential Amenity

45. The concerns of the parish council and immediate neighbours regarding light and noise pollution have been considered against the above factors. While these are significant concerns, on balance, the development is not found to result in an unacceptable adverse impact upon residential amenity. The Environmental Health Officer raised no objection in principle, but having regard to his detailed comments, conditions should be added to any consent granted to control the hours of operation of the MUGA and the time when floodlighting is used. It is recommended that floodlighting is not used after 20.20 hours and that all activity stops by 21.00 hours. Given that the use of the site will have restrictions on the hours of operation, it is not considered appropriate to restrict the use of the site to the school only.

Highway Safety

46. There is a good level of off road parking within a fenced car parking area to the North of the site and unrestricted parking along Manor Farm Road. Given that the proposals are not introducing a new use onto the site no additional parking provision is considered to be required.

Landscaping and Biodiversity

47. The proposal will not result in the removal of trees on the site, however given that the proposal will have a limited impact on nearby habitat, a condition should be added to any permission granted requiring; soft landscaping details to be submitted (subject to reported comments) and to impose the best working practice contained within the ecological assessment to avoid any likely harm.

Archaeology

48. Given the comments received above, a condition should be added to any permission as recommended.
49. The financial benefits that have been raised in representations do not represent material planning considerations that can be taken into account in this application:

Conclusion

50. Any adverse impacts of the development are not considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the material considerations set out in this report, and the proposed development remains acceptable. As such it is recommended that permission be granted.

Recommendation

51. Approval, subject to:

Conditions (to Include)

- (a) 3 year time limit
- (b) Approved drawings
- (c) Landscaping
- (d) Hours of use – restrict to 21.00hrs
- (e) Hours of operation of floodlights – restrict to 20.30hrs
- (f) Scheme of archaeological investigation
- (g) Scheme for the installation of automatic timer to control lighting

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 DPD 2007
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Development Control Policies DPD 2007
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Supplementary Planning Documents
- Draft Local Plan 2013
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Planning File Reference: S/0552/13/FL, S/2330/12/FL & S/0665/03/O

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