

NORTH AND EAST PLANS PANEL

THURSDAY, 25TH AUGUST, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor J Akhtar in the Chair

Councillors M Midgley, B Anderson, E Flint,
A Lamb, R. Stephenson, H Bithell, P Wray,
S Burke and J McKenna

SITE VISIT

Councillors Akhtar, Stephenson, McKenna, Flint and Anderson attended the site visit earlier in the day.

20 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

21 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

22 Late Items

There were no late items.

23 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jenkins and Councillor Sharpe.

Councillor Burke attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Jenkins and Councillor McKenna attended as substitute for Councillor Sharpe.

25 Minutes - 28th July 2022

The Chair informed the Panel that Mr Bickley, a speaker from the meeting held on 28th July 2022, had made comments and requested minor changes to the minutes. The Panel, considering the comments made by Mr Bickley, however, decided to approve the minutes without further changes.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th July 2022, be approved as a correct record.

26 20/08412/FU - Construction of a new community sports hub including 4 No. floodlit artificial grass pitches enclosed by metal ball-stop fencing, car parking and associated landscaping works are also proposed to connect the development to the wider Green Park, including a lit footpath link from the Redrow housing development to Austhorpe Primary School; external sub-station and bin store, on land off Thorpe Park Approach, Leeds, LS15

The report of the Chief Planning Officer presented an application for the construction of a new community sports hub including 4 floodlit artificial grass pitches enclosed by metal ball-stop fencing and car parking, alongside associated landscaping works also proposed to connect the development to the wider Green Park, including a lit footpath link from the Redrow housing development to Austhorpe Primary School; external sub-station and bin store, on land off Thorpe Park Approach, Leeds LS15.

Members had attended a site visit earlier in the day. Photographs and slides were shown throughout the presentation.

The Panel were provided with the following information:

- There had been a previous application for the wider Green Park site which proposed grass pitches and no floodlighting. Whereas this application proposed the use of artificial grass and floodlit pitches. Each of the three adult pitches would have 8 x 15m high lighting columns, the junior pitch would have 6 x 12m high columns. It was noted that lighting to the car park and paths would not have lighting columns higher than 6m. The operational hours including the community sports hub were proposed as 8:00 until 23:00 hours. The pitches' lighting would be controlled manually on a pitch by pitch basis from the reception desk and would be switched off by 22:00 hours. The lighting for the car park would be controlled via a timer clock. It was acknowledged that outside operational hours there would be lighting for security and safety.
- The applicant had advised that the artificial turf to be used was the best currently available. It was acknowledged that the floodlighting would be focussed on the pitches, with minimal light spillage, the presence of the lit floodlights would be visible from outside the site compared to existing light levels, as the space is currently open land and as the land falls away to the north of the site. However, lighting methods are to be used which would minimise the adverse impact of this.
- It was also noted that some of the trees would need to be removed in order to construct the vehicular access and lay out the pitches. While it was recognised that any new trees would take time to grow, new trees are proposed as part of the landscaping.
- The site includes an ancient monument known as Grim's Ditch and the Grade II* listed Austhorpe Hall. Impact on both these sites were addressed within the submitted report.
- Car parking would be provided with 227 spaces including disabled parking, motorcycle parking, cycle spaces and electric charging points.
- The sub-station and bin store would be built of buff brick and have a green roof planted with sedum.
- The community hub would be the focal point of the site, located close to the car park, it would have seating and viewing areas for the pitches, a café selling hot and cold drinks and sandwiches. The community hub would be open to the public not only those playing football. It was noted that this area would not be a licensed bar.

- The proposal is that the formal pitches will be separated from the surrounding parkland by ball stop fencing of 4.5 metres in height.
- A Biodiversity Net Gain calculation had been carried out which showed there are currently 44.97 habitat biodiversity units as a baseline, and these are reduced to 43.16 units post development. There are also 13.83 hedgerow biodiversity units as a baseline, and these are increased to 15.37 units post development. Accordingly, 1.81 habitat biodiversity units must be delivered off-site, and it is proposed that an area of Green Park to the north of Austhorpe Hall is used to provide the necessary habitat units. The adjacent area of land will be raised from 4.40 units to 7.36 units by creating a mixed scrub habitat. Overall, there will be a 2.5% increase in Habitat units and an 11% increase in hedgerow units. It was noted that the lighting would be designed so as not to disturb the bats in the area.
- A total of 163 representations had been received, with 137 objecting, 19 in support and 7 making general comments. These were summarised from Paragraph 26 to 32 of the submitted report. There have been 45 letters of representation received since the report was published, with 1 letter being sent directly to officers. However, these reiterate the comments and issues previously raised, considered and addressed in the submitted report.
- Since the time at which the report was published, Yorkshire Water has now responded and removed their previous objection subject to it being ensured that the existing sewer easement is respected.

Six people objecting to the application attended the meeting and provided the following information for the Panel Members:

- Lack of communication and consultation for this application from either the applicant or the officers.
- The proposed car park would not be large enough and therefore people would park on the roadside and outside resident's houses, as well as using surrounding roads for parking to avoid the circuitous route to the site via ELOR or Selby Road and Century Way.
- With the number of parking spaces being provided, it is clear that the facility is not just being created to benefit Leeds residents, but also those from further afield.
- One objector had written 3 letters in objection to the council and one to the local MP.
- Most of the people attending were of the view that the artificial turf proposed for the pitches was dangerous to health. Some presented research which showed how the particles were ingested and had been linked to cancer.
- Further, there was concern that particulates from the artificial turf could seep into water courses and be harmful to wildlife.
- It was also the view that the use of artificial turf would have an impact on the biodiversity of the area along with light pollution and noise pollution. It was the view that this area had been part of the city's greenspace, having been used as agricultural land and should be looked after as such.

- The objectors also raised concerns in relation to the cost benefits which were not stated in the report, but with it seeming that the project would be labour and cost intensive.

Responding directly to questions from Members, the objectors provided the following answers:

- Some consultation had taken place over Zoom due to the restrictions of the pandemic, but this had not been widely publicised. Some, but not all residents had received a flyer explaining the proposals. It was the consensus that no opportunity had been given to discuss the proposals and seek the view of the residents. The residents wanted it known that they did not oppose the pitches but did oppose the materials proposed to be used and the scale of the development proposed.
- It was noted that the historic use of the site had been for farming, but there had been several acres which used to be a coppice which had been cut down, but not replaced.
- It was recognised that the main cause for concern was the materials proposed for the pitches and the suggestion in some research that the particles arising from the materials when played on (if ingested) could link to the causing of cancer. However, in a statement read out at the meeting it was noted that Sport England had confidence in the use of artificial-turf for pitches and are in support of football's governing body – the Football Association – in their stance on the matter.

The Agent attended the meeting and provided the following points:

- There is a demand in the area for this type of facility. It would be beneficial to the area and could be used by a number of children's teams especially girls who have been inspired by the England women's team. It would also be used by disabled players and could be used by the walking football teams.
- In 2021, approximately 9000 amateur games had to be cancelled due to their being played on grass pitches. Artificial surface pitches are therefore needed to ensure year-round play.
- There are some difficulties with turf pitches, which cannot be used all year round due to flooding, whereas artificial turf can be used all year round.
- The facility was to be run by a non-profit making charity, and any profit made would be re-invested into the facilities on site and / or elsewhere in the city.
- Access to the site is proposed via Thorpe Park Approach to a large car park which would stop people parking on the surrounding streets to the west of the site. The car park would have 25 electric changing points.
- It was not the intention to bus in people from the wider Leeds area and it was noted that the furthest club which has registered its interest is located in Garforth. The intention is for there to be 50% use by local teams and then 50% local people independent use.
- Walking and cycle paths to and around the site promote health and wellbeing.

- The Community hub would have a café, but it was not proposed to be licensed. It would be open for all, including those from the surrounding area not engaging in play. There are also to be 2 x meeting rooms in the hub building available for use.
- The lighting proposed is as recommended by Sport England, with caps and limited light spill. The light spill from the floodlights would be controlled to the edge of the woodland. Careful thought has been given to acoustics to mitigate the noise impact.
- Historic England are supportive of the proposals for the ancient monument.
- In relation to biodiversity the proposals would look to increase habitat units by 2.5% and increase hedgerows units by 11%. 4 bat boxes and 12 bird boxes would be installed.
- The proposals seek to use sustainable technologies and construction methods and the hub has been designed to meet BREEAM Excellent standards. The drainage of the site has been designed to utilise sustainable urban drainage methods and the energy efficiency of the fabric of the building and the use of renewable technologies to minimise the energy use of the facilities.
- The community hub building includes a green roof to reduce surface water run-off and link the building visually to the wider area.

Responding to questions from the Members the Panel were provided with the following information:

- The number of electric charging points is in line with current council policy.
- The size of the car park is such to allow use for all members of teams that are playing at any one time (plus supporters and support team members), but also additional spaces for other people wishing to use the open green space and / or hub.
- The development of the facilities is in line with Sport England guidance. How the changing facilities would be used and allocated would be the responsibility of the facility's management team to organise.
- Consultation could not take place face to face due to restrictions during the pandemic. There were two online meetings and approximately 2500 flyers were distributed to residents. Ward Members were also consulted, and the applicant felt they made the best effort they could to undertake consultation in the difficult and restricted circumstances.
- The car park would be adjacent to the pavilion and all the facilities.
- Parklife is funded via Central Government and aims to encourage those who are not traditionally able to access football. It was noted that the client in this case was made up of a number of stakeholders which included City Development (Leeds City Council), the Football Association, Sport England and Active Leeds.
- An explanation was provided as to how the shades and louvres would work on the floodlights to mitigate light spillage. It was acknowledged that this falls within current industry guidelines. It was recognised that that residents in the area would be able to see a glow, but the shades would eradicate direct light spillage. Members were advised that the

floodlights are developed to direct light down onto the pitch, but the light does react differently to different surfaces and textures. The lighting for the car park and pathways would need to be on for security and safety, but this will be of a considerably lower height than the floodlighting for the pitches. Members acknowledged that it was impossible to say precisely how the light would affect residents as it would be dependent on the positioning of their house.

- The agent was unable to provide information in relation to the lifespan of the artificial turf pitches, but he said that it can be used all year, even in the winter months.
- A number of clubs had declared an interest in using the facilities. This was a non-profit making charity who were self-sustaining, and any profit would be used to improve facilities at the club and in Leeds. It was noted that prices are intended to be subsidised.
- It was noted that definitive figures relating to costs of different types of pitch surface or how many games had been cancelled when played on a grass pitch could not be provided.
- Members were advised that the facilities would include changing facilities for match officials. It was noted that gender neutral toilets would be provided.
- Public footpaths were to be maintained.
- The fences would reduce any anti-social behaviour in relation to access the pitches or leaving detritus on the pitches.
- There would be a boot cleaning facility on the premises to avoid any rubber crumb transference. Members who had experience of playing on artificial turf were of the view that the boot cleaning would not be sufficient in removing the rubber crumb.
- Members were advised that the use of artificial turf is part of the condition for funding Parklife so that the pitches can be all-weather use.

The Area Planning Group Manager provided some context for the Panel, acknowledging the concerns raised in relation to the artificial turf but that this Panel need to consider only planning matters and not duplicate considerations, including the matter of the direct health implications arising from artificial playing surfaces, that are catered for and regulated by other independent (non-planning) legislation. It was recognised that these surfaces were used throughout the city. The officers understood the concerns of the Councillors in relation to the consultation process, but the application had been publicised in accordance with statutory requirements. It was acknowledged that the applicant had also carried out consultation prior to the submission of the application within the constraints that existed during the pandemic. It was recognised that there had been a large response from members of the public in respect of this application, such that members of the public had nonetheless clearly had an opportunity to express their views on the application. He said given the strength of feeling about the way consultation was undertaken he would raise this with the Director of City Development, to be taken into account when applications are brought forward by City Development in the future.

Members' discussions included:

- Members frustration at how this application from Leeds City Council had been brought forward, without proper consultation and explanation. It was the view that this was something that was being done to the community rather than with the community, but it was acknowledged that the circumstances had constrained anything further being done in this instance.
- The facilities would be good for this area and open to the local community who could use the facility for coffee, meetings and walks.
- Members concerns in relation to parking on the southern side of the site rather than using the car parking. It was noted that there are currently some parking restrictions in front of the primary school and nursery and additional conditions could be included and used if parking becomes problematic.
- Some concern remained about the surface to be used, not in terms of the actual material itself, but just to ensure it has an appropriate longevity and how it will be recycled when the time comes.

Cllr Lamb proposed that the application be deferred to allow further consideration to be given to parking, floodlighting and the wider lighting impact. He also said that the applicant should provide information in relation to the lifespan of the artificial-turf pitches and the impact on climate emergency and recycling opportunities. He also suggested further information on community use.

Cllr Stephenson seconded the motion, this was put to the vote. Members voted in favour of this becoming the new motion, replacing the Officer's recommendation.

The newly proposed motion was, in turn, put to the vote.

RESOLVED – To defer the matter for:

- Further consultation by the applicant with the community
- Information to be provided in relation to parking, floodlighting and the wider impact of the lighting
- Lifespan of the pitches, including the impact on climate emergency of the material to be used.
- Community use for the proposed facilities.

27 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To note the next meeting of the North and East Plans Panels will be on Thursday 22nd September 2022, at 1.30pm in the Civic Hall.

The meeting concluded at 15:55