

## **Item D3**

### **Floodlit synthetic turf hockey pitch at Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School - TW/07/4011**

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 18 March 2008.

Application by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education and the Governors of Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School for the construction of a floodlit synthetic turf hockey pitch, including fencing, at Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School, Southfield Road, Tunbridge Wells - (Ref: TW/07/4011)

Recommendation: that planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): Mr R. Bullock

Classification: Unrestricted

#### **Site**

1. Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School is located to the north of Tunbridge Wells town centre, to the west of St. Johns Road, accessed via Southfield Road. The main school buildings are located to the south-east corner of the site, adjacent to the school only access from Southfield Road. To the north and west of the school site, playing fields and open grassland extend to the site boundary, along with some heavily wooded areas. The school site is bound to the east by residential properties on St Johns Road and Southfield Road, and to the south by St John's Recreation Ground. Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School's playing fields are located to the north of the site boundary, and open countryside to the west. The whole of the school site, excluding the main built development to the south-east corner, is within a Special Landscape Area. In addition, the Tunbridge Wells Borough Wide Local Plan identifies the site as being within the Rural Fringe, and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest is located to the west of the school boundary. The proposed floodlit pitch would be located in the north of the school site, adjacent to the fenced boundary with the Boys Grammar School's playing fields. A site plan is attached.

#### **Proposal**

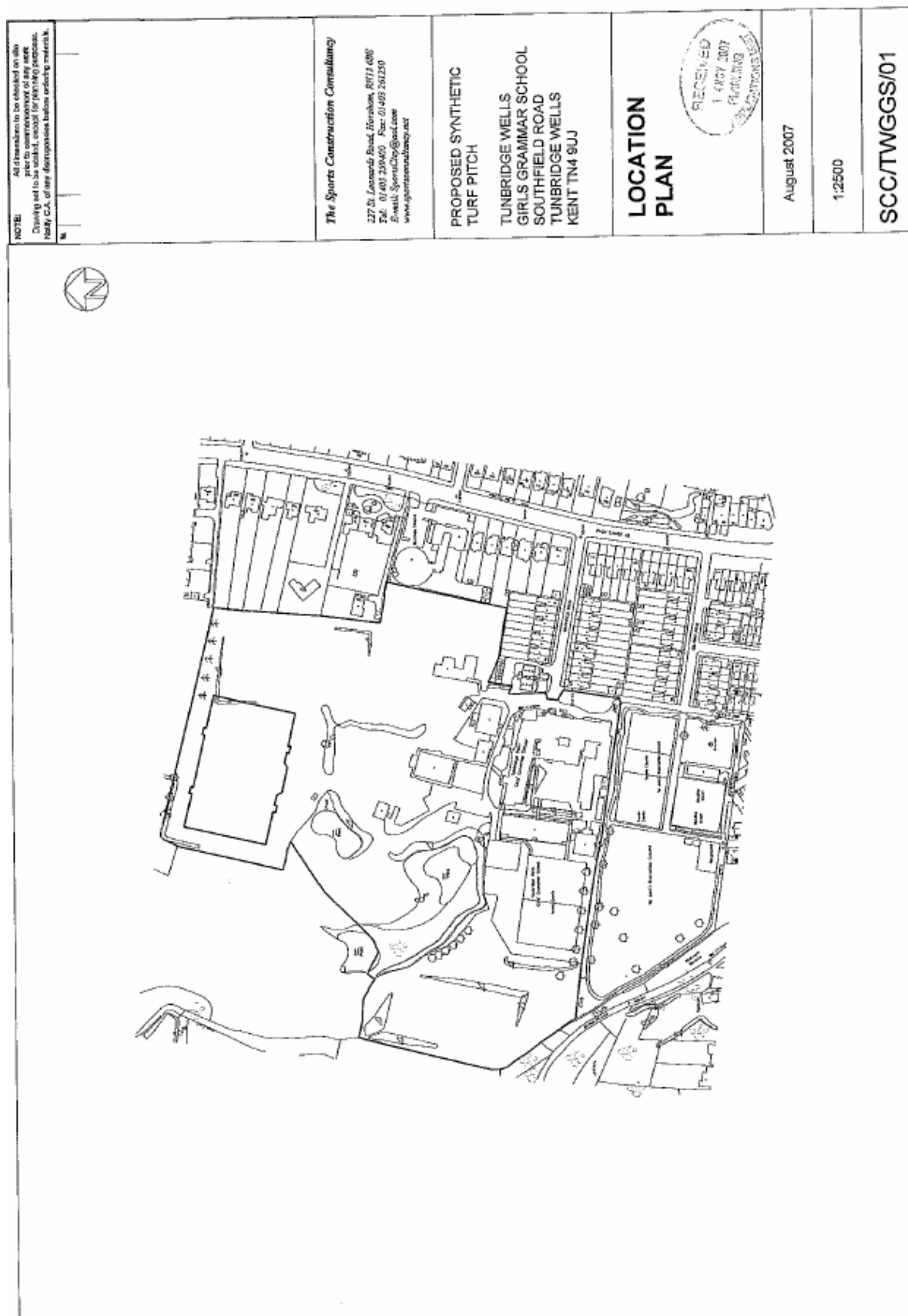
- 2 This application has been submitted by Kent County Council Children, Families and Education and the Governors of Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School and proposes the construction of a floodlit synthetic turf hockey pitch, including fencing. Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School (TWGGS) is a state funded grammar school teaching girls aged 11-18, with some boys from the local grammar schools attending sixth form lessons. The current school capacity is 966 girls. TWGGS would like to improve its outdoor sporting facilities by the building of an all weather synthetic turf pitch within the school grounds. The pitch would mostly be used for hockey, and would provide for essential curriculum needs within the school day, and also for competitive matches and tournaments outside of these times. This necessitates the requirement for a floodlit pitch because hockey is largely a winter sport. In addition, current facilities, apart from a small set of tennis courts, rely on grass pitches which, due to the clay based soil, are largely unusable for 3 months of the year. Additionally hockey, one of the school's main sports, is no longer played on grass pitches and the school is required to hire pitches in Hawkenbury, some 3 miles away. The school has a successful record in hockey, and the provision of a synthetic turf pitch at the school has been a long standing desire. The project would be solely funded by the school, a result of efficient fund management.

## SITE LOCATION PLAN

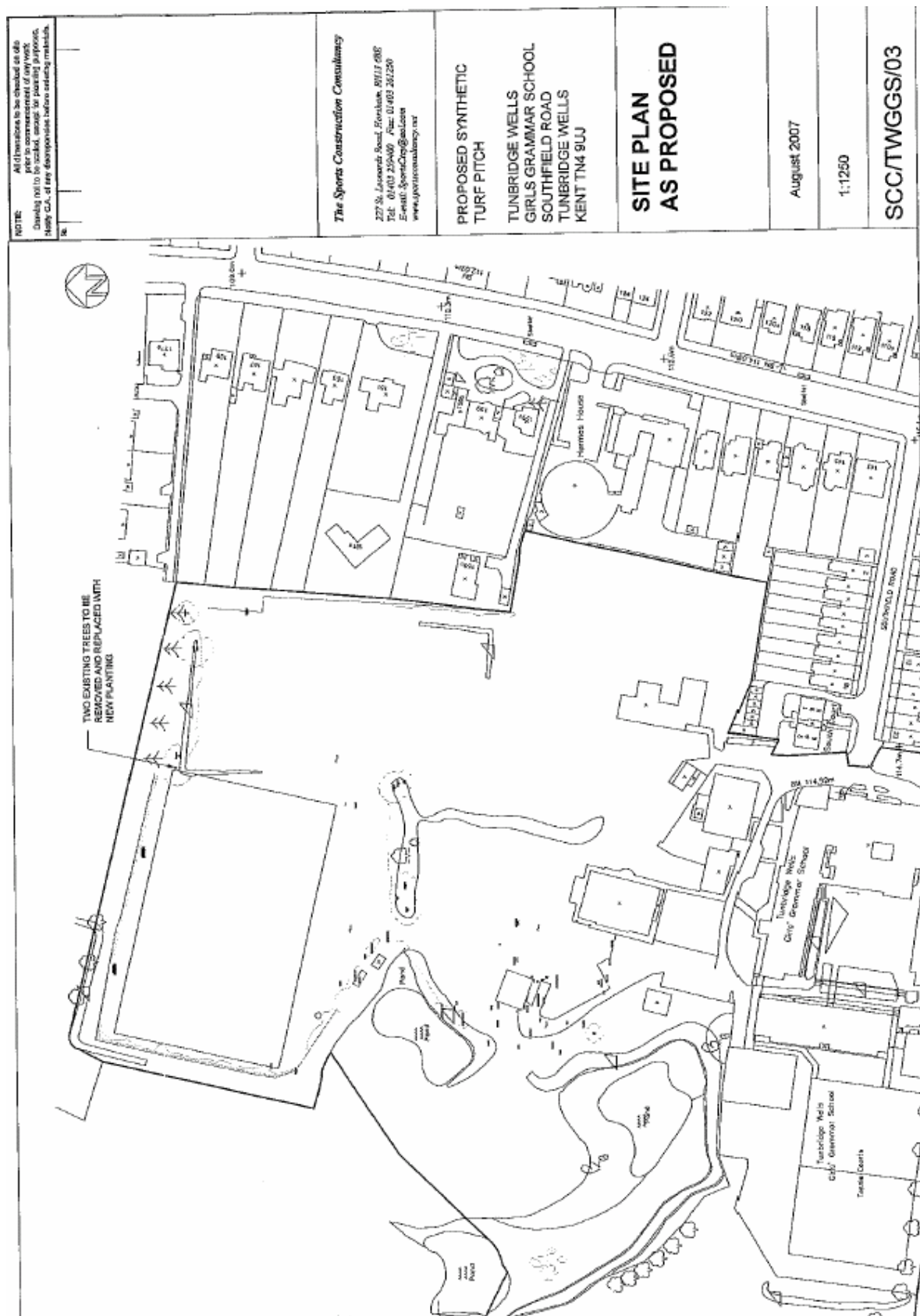


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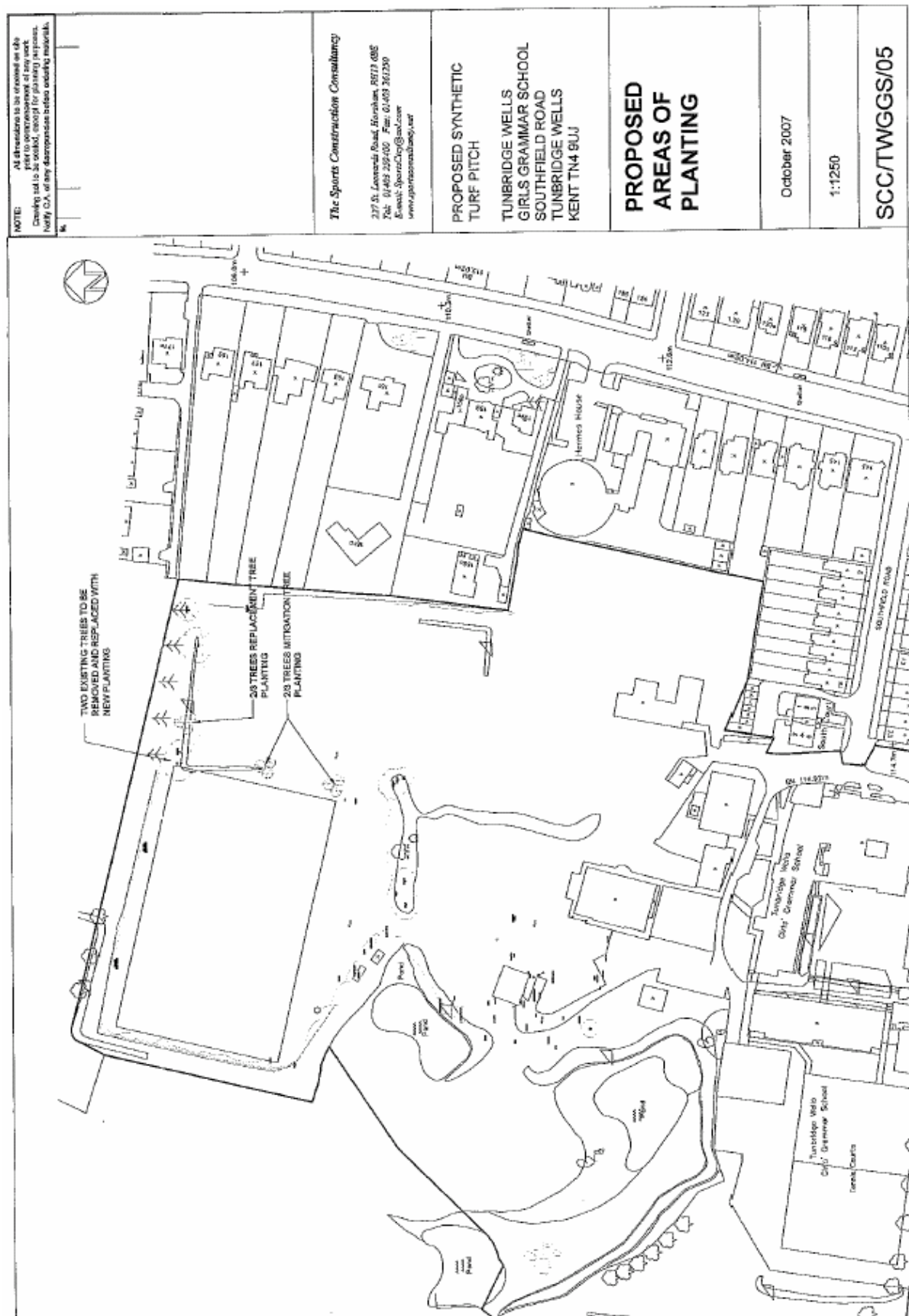


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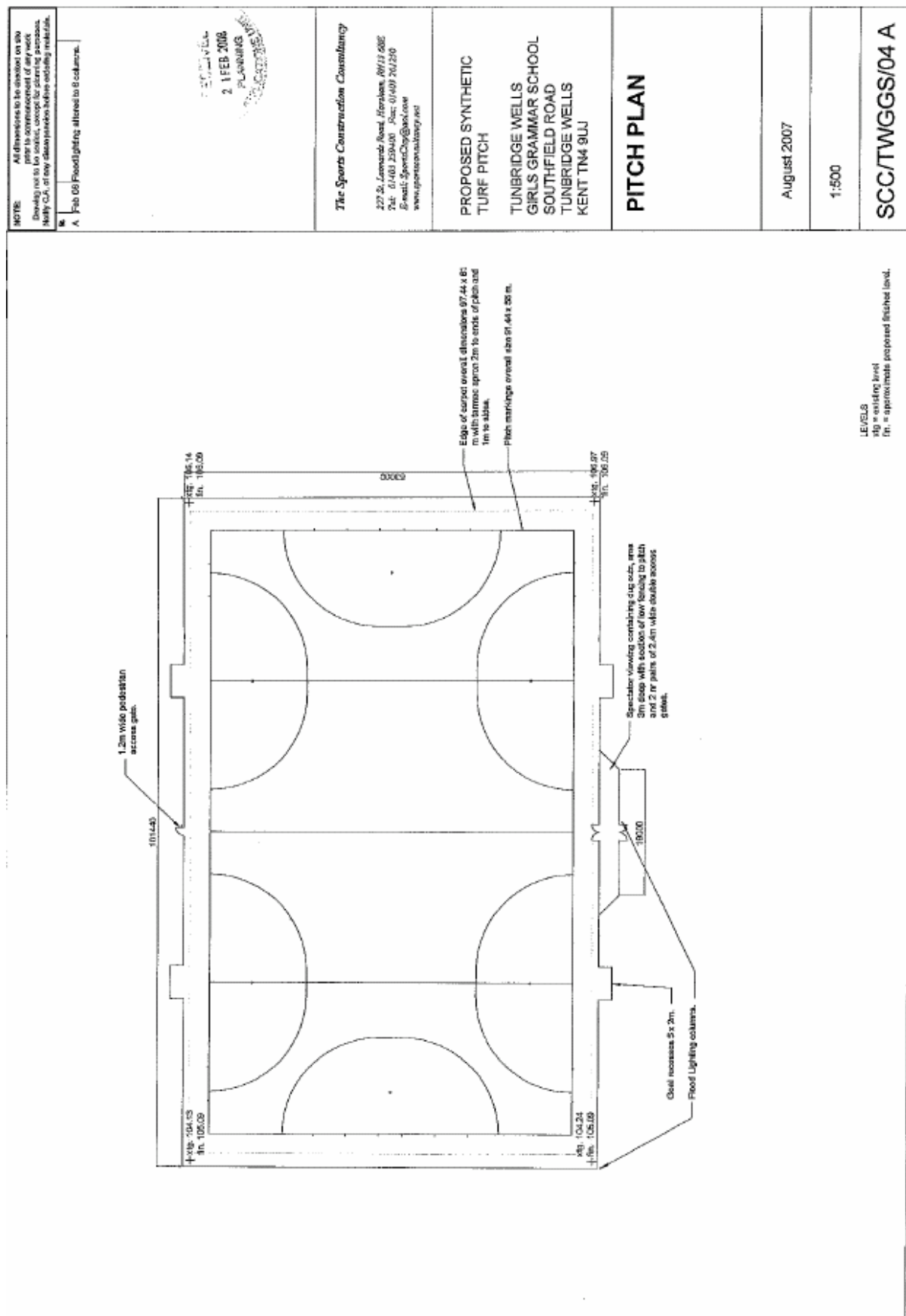




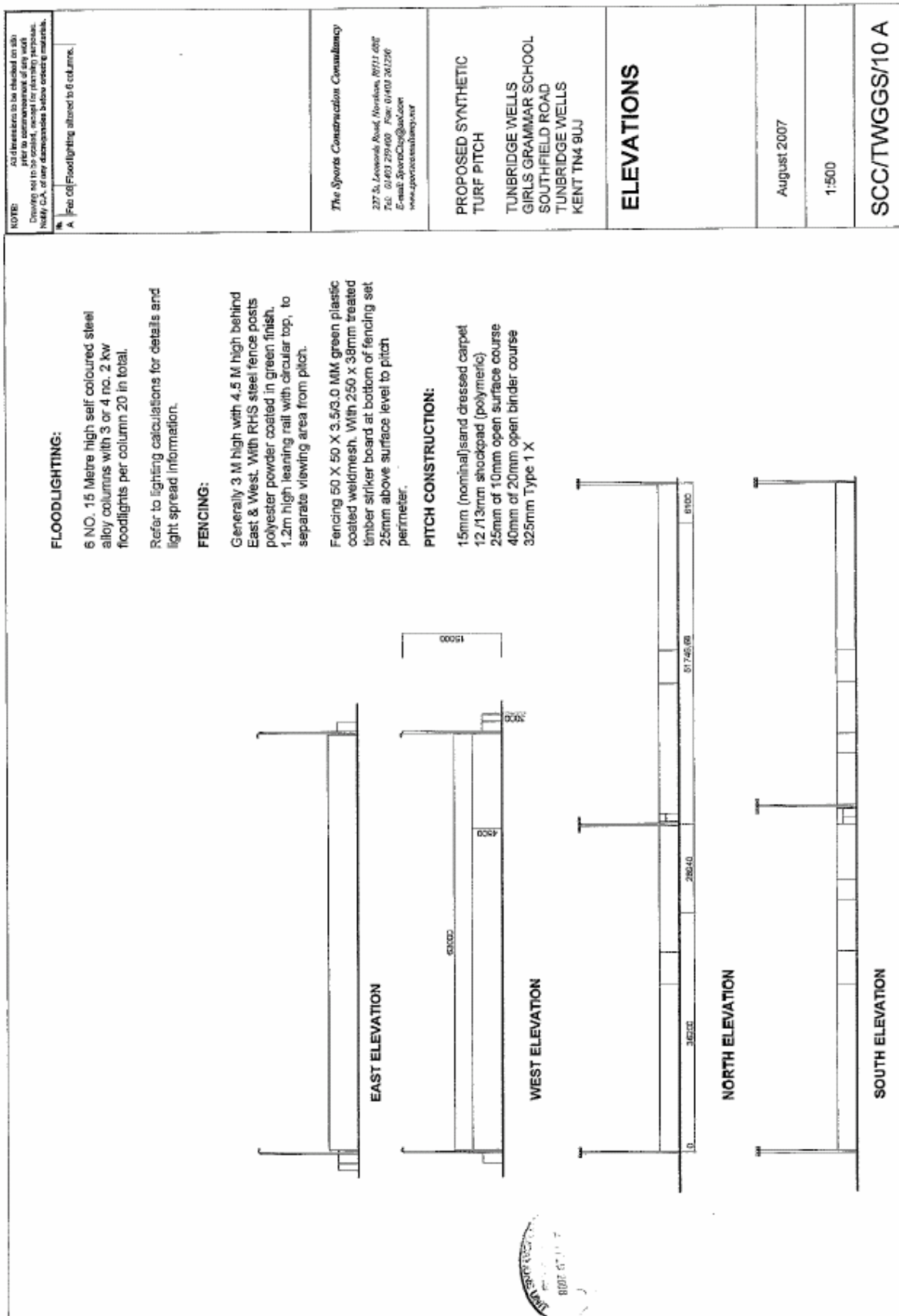
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3. This application proposes the construction of a 101 x 63metre pitch, including run off and a 2metre tarmac edge to the ends of the pitch, and 1metre to the sides. The synthetic turf would cover an area of 97 x 55 metres, accommodating 1 full size pitch, or 2 half pitches. The pitch would be oriented to run from east to west, and would be lit by 6 15 metre high self coloured steel alloy columns. Each column would accommodate 3 or 4 2kw floodlights, with a total of 20 lighting the pitch. The pitch would be fenced with 3 metre high green powder coated weldmesh fencing, which would increase in height to 4.5 metres to the east and west ends of the pitch. 2 goal recesses would be positioned along the north and southern sides of the fencing to allow play on 2 smaller pitches. A 0.25m timber striker board would be located at the base of the fencing, which the applicant proposes to cover in artificial grass to reduce noise generation.
4. Prior to the submission of this application, the School had three possible sites for the location of the floodlit pitch. Following pre-application discussions and the completion of ecological and tree surveys, the proposed location was considered to be the most suitable within the school site. The first of the three locations was to the west of the school site, on an abandoned former playing field. This was the initial preferred option due to its distance from neighbouring properties. However, this site was found to have potential ecological issues, with the likely presence of Great Crested Newts. In addition, the area, which is now overgrown and heavily wooded to the perimeter by mature trees and self-sown saplings, is fairly small and to obtain the required pitch size tree felling and substantial earth works would be required. It would also bound a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. This site was therefore discounted.
5. The second site considered is adjacent to the site proposed, to the north-eastern boundary of the site. However, this site would also require the felling of a number of mature trees from a copse, which again could raise ecological concerns. In addition, a badger sett (although considered by the School to be dormant) was within the development site. However, the main reason that this site was discounted was its proximity to neighbouring properties, being within metres from the boundary and, in two cases, the properties themselves. This site would have led to unacceptable levels of light and noise pollution and, subsequently, the third site was considered the most suitable.
6. The proposed location for the floodlit pitch is situated to the north of the school site, but to the far side of the site from properties on St Johns Road. The site lies within a natural dip in the ground, being approximately 2 metres lower than the playing field to the east (the second site considered). The site is currently home to the school's grass athletics track, which would be relocated to the playing field to the east, and is adjacent to the boundary with the Boys Grammar School's playing field. The proposed siting of the pitch would necessitate the removal of one semi-mature Oak Tree and a Hornbeam. A tree survey was submitted with this application, and the School advises that they would be happy to mitigate this loss by planting in the immediate vicinity, or elsewhere on the school site. In addition, tree protection measures would be adopted to protect the remaining trees to be retained. As this area of the school site is currently heavily mown, the applicant advises that it is unlikely to house protected species, or have wider ecological impacts. A protected species survey was submitted with this application which concludes that the use of this site would have no impact upon protected species.
7. As outlined above, the pitch would be approximately 2metres below the surrounding ground level due to a natural dip in the site. The end of the pitch closest to the St John's Road properties would be further lowered by 0.5metres to provide pitch gradients to the accepted criteria. Therefore, as part of the construction design, topsoil would be removed from the pitch area. The applicant confirms that it is not proposed to move this



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from site, but to use it for the improvement of another pitch and/or for the soft landscaping of previously approved schemes at the school. The lower level of the pitch helps to minimise the effect of the floodlights outside of the pitch area. A detailed lighting scheme was submitted with this application, and from the light spill levels supplied it can be seen that the light level is equivalent to moonlight at approximately halfway between the pitch and neighbouring properties. The applicant advises that the scheme would accord with the Institute of Lighting Engineer's Zone E2 and E3 guidance, whichever is considered appropriate for the site. The lighting would be governed by a time clock and be capable of partial switching to illuminate only half of the pitch if that is all that is being used. A safe access/egress lighting system would also be incorporated.

8. The hours of use of the pitch are proposed to be severely restricted, the bulk of use being up to 6.30pm, with very occasional weekend use. The applicant proposes the hours of use to be:
  - Weekday use limited to 9.00pm;
  - Saturday use limited to 9.00am to 7.00pm;
  - Sunday use limited to 10.00am to 5.00pm;
  - Weekend use restricted to 8 weekends per calendar year;
9. The pitch would be used for school training and school matches, which typically attract a small number of spectators, often around 10 in number. The School would like to offer some other educational use, and propose that the pitch would be used on an occasional basis by other Schools in the Tunbridge Wells Cluster, and those within a 5 mile radius of TWGGS. The pitch would be used principally by TWGGS, and would not be let out on a commercial basis or be made available for use by the general public.
10. In light of the above, the applicant does not expect that the pitch would generate any significant increase in traffic locally. As inter-school matches would take place after school, any parking required for this could be accommodated within the school site using existing parking. An access path is proposed for foot traffic to the pitch from the car parking/hard surfaced areas. This would also serve as an emergency access, and would allow maintenance equipment to gain access on a firm surface. It is not expected that the pitch would be used for wheelchair sport but, nevertheless, the access would also serve as a wheelchair access for either sports participation or spectating. The route of the access path would be used as the construction access, which would be scheduled, as far as is possible, outside of school terms.

*Reduced copies of the submitted drawings showing the site layout, floor plans and elevations are attached.*

### Planning Policy

11. The Development Plan Policies summarised below are relevant to the consideration of the application:
  - (i) **The Kent & Medway Structure Plan: Adopted 2006:**
    - Policy SP1** - Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and ensure a sustainable pattern of development.
    - Policy QL1** – Seeks to conserve and enhance the environment through the quality of development and design. Developments, individually

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or taken together, should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of their local surroundings.

**Policy QL12** - Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services. New community services will be located where they are accessible by walking and cycling and by public transport from the area they serve. Wherever practical they will be located in town, district or local centres.

**Policy QL15** – All major formal recreation and sports facilities should be accessible by choice of transport and designed to avoid nuisance from traffic, noise and lighting.

**Policy EN1** - Kent's countryside will be protected, conserved and enhanced for its own sake. Development in the countryside should seek to maintain or enhance it.

**Policy EN5** – The primary objective of designating Special Landscape Areas is the protection, conservation and enhancement of the quality of their landscapes, whilst having regard to the need to facilitate the social and economic well-being of the communities situated within them.

**Policy EN8** - Wildlife habitats and species will be protected, conserved and enhanced. Development likely to have an adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively, on important habitats or species, will not be permitted unless the adverse impact on an important nature conservation resource can be adequately mitigated and/or compensated.

**Policy EN9** - Tree cover and the hedgerow network should be maintained. Additionally, they should be enhanced where this would improve the landscape, biodiversity, or link existing woodland habitats.

**Policy TP19** - States that development proposals should comply with vehicle parking policies and maximum standards adopted by the County Council.

**Policy NR5** – The quality of Kent's environment will be conserved and enhanced. This will include the visual, ecological, geological, historic and water environments, air quality, noise and levels of tranquillity and light intrusion.

(ii) **Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (2006):**

**Policy EN1** - Seeks all proposals to be compatible in nature and intensity with neighbouring uses and not cause significant harm to character and amenities of the area in terms of daylight, sunlight, privacy, noise or excessive traffic generation. Seeks the design of the proposal to respect the context of the site and not cause significant harm to residential amenities.

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**Policy EN14** - Development proposals that would affect a Site of Special Scientific Interest or the habitat of a protected species will only be permitted where it would have no detrimental effect on the nature conservation or geological interest of the site.

**Policy EN27** - Within the High and Low Weald Special Landscape Areas, but outside the boundary of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, development proposals will only be permitted where they would cause no significant harm to the important landscape character of the area.

**Policy TP4** - Seeks new development to be located where the road hierarchy has adequate capacity to cater for the traffic which would be generated by the development, and not compromise the safety and free flow of traffic or for other road users. Seeks a safely located access with adequate visibility.

**Policy TP5** - Vehicle parking in connection with development proposals will be restricted to the maximum necessary having regard to local highway conditions. Kent County Council's Vehicle Parking Standards, adopted by the Council, will be applied to such development proposals.

**Policy RF2**- Land within the Rural Fringe will be safeguarded from development as a reserve of land to meet the longer term development needs unless the proposal would meet the needs of an established use on the site or would be for a temporary development. Proposals should not prejudice the longer-term comprehensive development of the Rural Fringe and should respect the special characteristics and constraints of the site.

### Consultations

12. **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:** raises no objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of conditions requiring a more robust landscaping scheme and ensuring that there would be no commercial use of the pitch. In addition, it is suggested that the pitch should not be used at all on weekends or public holidays, except with the prior written consent of the County Planning Authority, in order to protect the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

**The Divisional Transportation Manager:** raises no objections to the proposal. It is recommended that a condition be placed on the decision which restricts the use of the facility to non-commercial uses. Commercial use would generate significant additional traffic and result in on-street parking demand, which would be potentially hazardous to other highway users.

**The County Biodiversity Officer:** raises no objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of a number of conditions including; the lighting to be installed and operated in accordance with the details submitted, the undertaking of a badger survey prior to the commencement of works to assess the site for new badger excavations, protection of nesting birds, details of biodiversity enhancement, and the development to accord with

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the recommendations made within the Protected Species Survey and Amphibian & Reptile Habitat Assessment.

**The County Council's Landscape Advisor:** comments as follows:

"We commend the School's prior consultation with its neighbours regarding the proposed work and appreciate the neighbours' comments regarding the openness of their views in a westerly direction, and desire to 'disguise the lines of columns that will be apparent'.

Drawing no.SCC/TWGGS/05 – Proposed Areas of Planting, submitted within this application shows three areas of tree planting at 2/3no.trees per area. The group of trees located to the south-east corner of the proposed pitch may disguise the lighting column immediately adjacent to it, but the other columns would remain visible from very shallow angles outside the eastern-horizontal. Light spill would not be blocked-out by this small quantity of trees, and although there is a central group of trees at the east end of the pitch, we feel this is still too sparse for the proposal.

We appreciate the School's need to retain the flat open spaces (especially that to the east of the proposed pitch) and the limited timescales being put on the pitch use. However, we feel a slightly larger quantity of clustered tree planting along the existing bank would not only help disguise the pitch and columns from the neighbours, but would also help soften the overall view of the area in a naturalistic way, adding to the westerly views rather than causing a negative impact.

We recommend a greater number of trees of advanced nursery stock (including evergreens such as Scots Pine) are planted in more linear groups. We suggest that the applicant resubmits their proposals, along with a 5 year maintenance plan, for approval."

**The County Council's Noise Advisor:** considers that noise levels would not increase as a result of hockey players calling/shouting, hockey balls striking hockey sticks, and supporters cheering. The introduction of timber kick boards remains a potential source of adverse noise impact but the applicant has stated that they would cover the timber with artificial grass carpeting and this needs to be undertaken.

**The County Council's Lighting Advisor:** comments as follows:

"The school is 100m or so from the A26 St John's Road which runs from Tunbridge Wells to Tonbridge. The proposed sports pitch, which is to the north of the main school building, has more sports pitches and a leisure centre to the north, the rear of houses facing the A26 to the east, the school to the south and open country to the west. I would therefore classify the area as category E3 "small town centres or urban locations."

The site has little natural screening but is approximately 2m lower than the buildings to the east of the site. The floodlights chosen are of the flat glass type with the lantern mounted horizontally thereby reducing any upward light to a minimum and minimising spill light outside of the area to be lit. The calculations show that the spill light reduces to 1 lux some 45m from the edge of the playing surface and since the closest property is 80m away the spill light at this distance will be negligible. Unfortunately there are no

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calculations indicating vertical illuminance but based on the horizontal illuminance and other submissions it is clear that the levels will be well below the maximum of 10 lux for an E3 area.

The proposed lighting therefore complies with the requirements of the ILE Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light."

**Sport England:** raises objection to the application on the grounds that community use is not incorporated into the scheme. Following the submission of additional information by the applicant, no further comments have been received at the time of writing this report.

### **Local Member**

13. The local County Member, Mr R. Bullock, was notified of the application on the 19 November 2007, and has no objections or comments to make.

### **Publicity**

14. The application was publicised by the posting of a site notice, advertisement in a local newspaper, and the individual notification of 71 nearby properties.

### **Representations**

15. 3 letters of representation have been received to date. The main planning comments/points of concern and objection can be summarised as follows:
- The proposed development affects an area of considerable landscape merit, adjacent to a Special Landscape Area;
  - The fencing and lighting columns would substantially reduce the sense of openness of the whole area;
  - Should planning permission be granted, the Council should seek to establish a basis for avoiding the remaining playing fields becoming degraded by piecemeal developments;
  - A previous application for a 2.4 metre fence at the site was refused planning permission on the grounds of visual intrusion;
  - The old sports pitch to the west of the site should be used as it would not impact upon neighbouring properties;
  - Access to the school is already limited to Southfield Road, a narrow double parked residential street;
  - Traffic chaos and congestion is already a concern, this application would severely exacerbate current concerns. The local roads cannot take any more traffic;
  - Concerned about the commercial hiring out of the facility;
  - Use by other schools would greatly increase disturbance to neighbours. It is suggested that all matches should involve a team from TWGGS, and it should not be used every evening and every weekend;
  - The facility would create considerable light and noise pollution, and would intrude into peaceful evenings and weekends, adversely affecting the quality of life for nearby residents;
  - A time limit should be placed upon the use of the pitch to reduce disturbance to neighbours, one neighbour suggests 19.30, another 21.30;
  - The development would impact upon wildlife and protected species;
  - The School's need for an all weather pitch to the standards set by the Sports Governing Bodies is recognised;



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- It is recognised that the School has gone to some lengths to consult local residents and sought to ameliorate the visual impact of the pitch through colouring the fencing and providing additional planting;

### **Discussion**

16. In considering this proposal regard must be had to the Development Plan policies outlined in paragraph (11) above. Section 38(6) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, this proposal needs to be considered in the context of the Development Plan Policies, Government Guidance and other material planning considerations arising from consultation and publicity. Issues of particular relevance include site selection and impact upon the landscape, hours and type of use, highway implications and access, trees, ecology, and local residential amenity.
17. Policies SP1 and QL1 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan & EN1 of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan, seek to conserve and enhance the environment and require development to be well designed and respect its setting. This is particularly relevant to this site which is within a Special Landscape Area and designated as Land within the Rural Fringe, which are subject to policy designations which intend to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of the landscape.

### **Site Selection and impact upon the landscape**

18. As detailed in paragraphs 4, 5 & 6 of this report, the applicant initially had 3 possible sites upon which to locate the floodlit pitch. The need for Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School (TWGGS) to have such a facility is outlined in paragraph 2 of this report, and is accepted. The proposed siting of the pitch was carefully considered and influenced by policy designations, amenity of local residents, impacts upon trees and the findings and recommendations of ecological surveys. All three of the proposed sites were within the Special Landscape Area and, therefore, the impact upon the wider landscape was also a consideration.
19. Two of the proposed sites were discounted on the grounds of loss of trees, ecological implications, the need for substantial earth works, proximity to local properties and proximity to a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (explained in more detail in paragraphs 4-6). The proposed site for the floodlit pitch was considered by the applicant to be the most suitable and the least contentious of the three possible sites. Located to the north of the school site, but to the far side of the site from properties in St Johns Road, the proposed site is in closer proximity to neighbouring residents than one of the sites considered, but further away than the second option. This site has the advantage of being 2 metres lower than the playing field located to the east, and is home to the schools grass athletic track which means it is level and mown on a regular basis. The impact of the proposed development on trees and ecology will be discussed in detail below, but in principle the use of this site is deemed to be acceptable with regards to these matters. In addition, the impact of the proposal with regards to residential amenity due to noise and light pollution, and impact upon the local highway network, will be discussed later in this report. However, the impact upon the landscape needs to be considered at this stage.
20. The proposed site for the floodlit pitch is within a Special Landscape Area, and on Land within the Rural Fringe as designated with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan. Policy RF2 of the Local Plan seeks to safeguard land within the Rural Fringe from

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development, unless the proposal would meet the needs of an established use on site. In this instance, the proposed development is located within the school site, which is an established educational facility. The School has demonstrated a case of need for the facility, and I consider that the proposal would meet the needs of the school. Therefore, I do not consider that the development would be contrary to the principles of Policy RF2, and conclude that the development would be appropriate within its Rural Fringe location. However, the application site is within a Special Landscape Area, within which development would only be permitted where it would cause no significant harm to the important landscape character of the area. The primary objective of a Special Landscape Area is the protection, conservation and enhancement of the quality of the landscape, whilst having regard to the need to facilitate the social and economic well-being of the communities situated within them.

21. The impact of this proposal on trees and ecology, and its wider noise and lighting implications will be discussed later in this report. However, although the provision of a floodlit pitch could not be said to enhance the quality of the landscape, the design of the pitch itself needs to be discussed to make sure that the development is seeking to conserve the quality of the landscape and would cause no significant harm. The applicant is proposing to install 6 15 metre high self coloured steel alloy columns which would house the lighting for the pitch. The applicant has undertaken pre-application discussions with neighbouring properties and, as a result, it was considered best to leave the poles in an alloy finish as these would better blend with the sky. On the contrary, the 3 and 4 metre high weldmesh fencing to the perimeter of the pitch would be finished in dark green, to better blend with trees and planting, and the wider landscape beyond. The height of the fencing and the lighting poles may appear excessive but are necessary for the proposed development to be fit for purpose. The applicant has, however, mitigated the impact of the development by finishing the 'built' elements of the scheme in an appropriate colour. This would form a condition of consent, as would the retention and protection of existing trees and the provision of new areas of planting. I therefore consider that, subject to the imposition of conditions, the design of the floodlit pitch would not have a significantly detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the Special Landscape Area.
22. I consider that the applicant has successfully demonstrated that the use of alternative sites within the school grounds has been carefully considered and that the implications of each site were assessed. I therefore consider the proposed siting of the floodlit pitch to be acceptable in principle, subject to the successful resolution of the matters to be discussed below.

### Trees

23. The proposed siting of the pitch would necessitate the removal of one semi-mature Oak Tree, and a Hornbeam. (It should be noted that this level of tree removal is much lower than that associated with the other sites considered by the school to house the pitch.) The removal of these two trees, although regrettable, is not considered by the County Council's Landscape Advisor to have a significant effect on the landscape and therefore, would not have a detrimental impact upon the Special Landscape Area. The School also advise that they would be happy to mitigate this loss by planting in the immediate vicinity, or elsewhere within the school site. In addition, tree protection measures would be adopted to protect the remaining trees to be retained.
24. The applicant has submitted a landscaping proposal with this application, although this is considered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the County Council's Landscape Advisor not to be robust enough. As mentioned above, the applicant has

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undertaken pre-application discussion with neighbouring residents, and have advised that the submitted scheme addressed the concerns of neighbouring residents. According to the applicant, the overriding requirement of those most affected was the openness of their views in a westerly direction, and it was therefore requested that limited planting should disguise the lighting columns, whilst maintaining open views. The applicant goes on to state that;

“The School has engaged their neighbours in a considerate manner, and would wish this consideration and understanding to prevail if possible. There has been considerable recent planting to the west and north boundaries and this should thicken up and mature in years to come without going against the wishes of neighbours. The school also, incidentally, needs to mark out an athletics track on the flat piece of land between the proposed pitch and the school boundary and this could be a problem if the available area is reduced.”

25. In light of this, I consider that a revised landscaping scheme should be submitted pursuant to planning condition, which should include additional planting where appropriate, whilst maintaining open views. Due to the consultation already undertaken by the school, I consider that it would be appropriate in this instance to consult the two closest properties to the school boundary on the revised landscaping scheme. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the County Council's Landscape Advisor must consider the opinions of the nearest local residents when commenting on the revised landscaping scheme as the purpose of the planting is to not only mitigate the impact of the proposal on the wider landscape, but to mitigate the impact of the development upon neighbouring properties.
26. I consider that subject to the imposition of conditions to ensure all trees to be retained are protected throughout construction works, and that a revised scheme of landscaping be submitted for consultation and approval, that the development would not have a detrimental impact upon trees. This is important given the site's landscape designations.

#### Ecology

27. The proposed site is the existing school running track and is, therefore, heavily mown on a regular basis. A protected species survey was submitted with this application which concludes that the use of the site would have no impact upon protected species. In addition, an Amphibian and Reptile Habitat Assessment was submitted by the applicant, which concludes that Great Crested Newts and Reptiles are unlikely to be disturbed by the development and that no further survey work is recommended. The County Council's Biodiversity Officer raises no objection to the proposed development, subject to the imposition of conditions, as outlined in paragraph 12 of this report. Therefore, subject to the imposition of the requested conditions, I am satisfied that the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact upon protected species or the biodiversity value of the site.

#### Hours and type of use

28. Throughout the consultation period concern has been expressed over the implications of the floodlit pitch with regards to increased traffic, access arrangements and light and noise pollution. These issues are directly related to the hours of use of the pitch, and the type of use proposed and, therefore, these elements of the proposal will be discussed first. The applicant proposes that the hours of use be severely restricted, the

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bulk of use being up to 6.30pm, with very occasional weekend use. The applicant proposes the hours of use to be:

- Weekday use limited to 9.00pm;
- Saturday use limited to 9.00am to 7.00pm;
- Sunday use limited to 10.00am to 5.00pm;
- Weekend use restricted to 8 weekends per calendar year;

29. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council suggest that the pitch should not be used at all on weekends or public holidays, except with the prior written consent of the County Planning Authority. However, that would be a complicated, time consuming procedure. I consider that by restricting the use to 8 weekends per calendar year, as suggested by the applicant, this would ensure that the development did not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of local residents. In addition, the hours of weekend use suggested by the applicant are restrictive and would ensure early mornings and evenings were not impacted upon. Therefore, I consider that the proposed number of weekend uses, and proposed weekend hours of use are acceptable and would not have an unacceptable impact upon the amenity of local residents.
30. Local residents have suggested that a time limit should be placed on use of the pitch to reduce disturbance to neighbours, one suggesting an end time of 7.30pm, and another 9.30pm. The weekend hours of use accord with the earliest time suggested, whereas weekday use is proposed until 9.00pm. The applicant does advise that most of use would be during the school day and for after school matches, which would cease at 6.30pm. However, the applicant does advise that TWGGS would like to offer some other educational use, and propose that the pitch would be used on an occasional basis by other Schools in the Tunbridge Wells Cluster, and those within a 5 mile radius of TWGGS. However, the pitch would be used principally by TWGGS, and would not be let out on a commercial basis or be made available for use by the general public. Use by other schools may necessitate some use in the evenings, and therefore a 9.00pm end time is requested. I do not consider this to be an unreasonable hour, and therefore see no reason not to allow use of the facility until 9.00pm on weekdays.
31. With regards to the type of use proposed, local residents have expressed concern over use beyond that by the School and would wish to see it conditioned that every match should involve a team from TWGGS. In addition, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent Highway Services have requested, should planning permission be granted, a condition of consent should be that there would be no commercial use of the pitch. However, contrary to this, Sport England has expressed concern over the proposed development due to a lack of commercial community use. In this instance, wider commercial community use of the facility is not appropriate due to the site's location and access arrangements. In addition, it is not something the School wants to pursue as they do not wish this to be an intensively used facility. I also do not consider that wider commercial use of the pitch would be appropriate, and therefore, this would be a condition of consent.
32. The level of use proposed by TWGGS, in that the pitch would be used on an occasional basis by other Schools in the Tunbridge Wells Cluster, appears to appropriate for the site. Should use be limited to matches involving pupils from TWGGS only, the facility would be an under used resource in the area. Limited and controlled use within the hours proposed by local Schools is considered to be a reasonable request, and I do not see any reason to refuse the planning application on this ground. Therefore, should Members be minded to permit, I suggest that permission be granted for the hours and type of use proposed, and that it be conditioned that the floodlit pitch is not used on a commercial basis for the wider community.

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Highway implications and access

33. In light of the above, the applicant does not expect that the pitch would generate any significant increase in traffic locally. As inter-school matches would take place after school, any parking required for this could be accommodated within the school site using existing parking. An average number of 10 spectators may attend a match, and parking for this number of vehicles could easily be accommodated as matches which spectators would attend would be out of school hours. In addition, use by other local Schools would generally involve accessing the site via a mini bus, which could be easily accommodated within the site both during and after school hours.
34. Local residents have expressed concern over the increased levels of traffic associated with this application, but this would only be a significant cause for concern should the facility be hired out commercially for the wider community. As that is not deemed to be appropriate, and could be governed by condition, Kent Highway Services raises no objection to the proposal. Therefore, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions, I do not consider that this proposal would have a significantly detrimental impact on the local highway network, and am satisfied that all parking associated with the development could be accommodated within the school site.
35. As Southfield Road is a narrow residential street, which is often double parked, I consider it appropriate to condition that vehicles associated with the construction of the pitch do not enter or leave the site between the hours of 8.30 & 9.30am and 3.30 & 4.30pm.

Local Residential Amenity

36. In addition to the issues discussed above, local residents have expressed concern over potential noise and light pollution from the proposed flood lit pitch. With regards to lighting, the applicant proposes that the pitch would be oriented from east to west and would be lit by 6 x 15metre high columns, each of which would accommodate 3 or 4 x 2kw floodlights, with a total of 20 lighting the pitch. A detailed lighting scheme was submitted with this application, and from the light spill levels supplied it can be seen that the light level would be equivalent to moonlight at approximately halfway between the pitch and neighbouring properties. The applicant advises that the lighting scheme would accord with Zone E2 and E3 guidance, whichever is considered appropriate for the site.
37. The County Council's Lighting Advisor has assessed the scheme submitted with this application, and classifies the area as category E3 "small town centres or urban locations. The floodlights proposed are of the flat glass type with the lantern mounted horizontally thereby reducing any upward light to a minimum and minimising spill light outside of the area to be lit. The submitted calculations show that the spill light reduces to 1 lux some 45m from the edge of the playing surface and, since the closest property is 80m away, the spill light at this distance would be negligible. The Lighting Advisor considers that, based on the horizontal illuminance and other submissions, it is clear that the levels would be well below the maximum of 10lux for an E3 area. It is considered, therefore, that the proposed lighting complies with the requirements of the Institute of Lighting Engineers' Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light. In addition, the lighting would be governed by a time clock and be capable of partial switching to illuminate only half of the pitch if that is all that is being used. Therefore, I do not consider that the lighting scheme proposed would have a significantly detrimental impact upon local residential amenity.



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38. Neighbouring residents have also expressed concern over potential noise generation from players and spectators. However, it is important to note that the existing grass hockey pitch is located to the east of the proposed synthetic tuft pitch, closer to residential properties. However, the existing grass pitch would only be used during day light hours and would be unlikely to attract spectators. However, the applicant advises that school matches would only attract a small number of spectators, typically around 10 in number. The County Council's Noise Advisor considers that noise levels would not increase as a result of hockey players calling/shouting hockey balls striking hockey sticks and supporters cheering. The introduction of timber kick boards is the only potential noise source which is considered to be a concern. However, the applicant has stated that they would cover the timber with artificial grass carpeting. To ensure that this is undertaken, this would form a condition of consent. Subject to this, I do not consider that the development would have any significant impacts with regards to the generation of noise.

**Conclusion**

39. In summary, I consider that there are special circumstances to justify the proposed development within a Special Landscape Area. I consider that the siting and design of the floodlit pitch would not have a significantly detrimental effect on the amenity of local residents or the character and appearance of the Special Landscape Area. Subject to the imposition of conditions, I am of the opinion that the proposed development would not give rise to any material harm and is otherwise in accordance with the general principles of the relevant Development Plan Policies. Therefore, I recommend that permission be granted subject to appropriate conditions.

**Recommendation**

40. I RECOMMEND that PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO conditions, including conditions covering:
- the standard time limit;
  - the development to be carried out in accordance with the permitted details;
  - details of the fencing colour finish;
  - timber kick boards to be covered in artificial grass;
  - a amended scheme of landscaping, its implementation and maintenance;
  - tree protection;
  - protection of nesting birds;
  - recommendations of ecological Surveys/Reports;
  - pre-commencement survey of the site for badgers;
  - biodiversity enhancement measures;
  - hours of use including limit on number of weekends per year;
  - no commercial community use of the pitch;
  - level of use of the pitch to accord with submitted details;
  - lighting to be installed in accordance with approved details, and checked on site;
  - lighting levels not to exceed those specified within the application;
  - extinguishing of lighting when pitch not in use;
  - hours of working during construction,
  - measures to prevent mud and debris on the highway;
  - no vehicles associated with construction to enter/leave the site between 8.30 and 9.30 am and 3.30 and 4.30 pm.

Case officer – Mary Green	01622 221066
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Background documents - See section heading
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