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APPLICATION TM/06/3796 – ALL WEATHER PITCH AND MULTI-USE GAMES AREA AT HUGH CHRISTIE TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE, TONBRIDGE

NOTES of a Planning Applications Committee Members' site meeting at the Hugh Christie Technology College, Tonbridge on Monday, 23 January 2007.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr A R Bassam (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Mrs S V Hohler, Mr G A Horne, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr T A Maddison, Mr R A Mr A R Poole and Mrs P A V Stockell. Dr T R Robinson was present as the local Member.

OFFICERS: Mr J Crossley, Mr P Hopkins and Ms H Woodcock (Planning) and Mr A Tait (Legal and Democratic Services)

THE APPLICANTS: Mr T Burton (Assistant Principal – Hugh Christie), (Mr B Rogers and Mr G Fordham (Verry Construction).

OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES: Tonbridge and Malling BC (Cllrs Miss J R Browne and R A Dorling with Ms J Hamilton - Planning Department);

ALSO PRESENT were some 100 members of the public.

- (1) The meeting was held indoors due to the inclement weather.
- (2) The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone present. He asked Mr Tait to explain that the purpose of the meeting was for Members of the Committee to see the site and to listen to the views of those present.
- (3) Mr Crossley introduced the application, which had been jointly brought forward by KCC Children, Families and Education and by Kent Education Partnership. The application was complementary to a PFI scheme (permitted in 2004) which aimed to completely rebuild the school in order to meet the needs of the modern school curriculum.
- (4) The aim of this application was to increase the sports provision which currently consisted of a number of pitches and floodlit tennis courts. It envisaged a multi-use games area mainly for tennis and netball and an all-weather pitch for soccer and hockey. These would be located to the North at the rear of the new buildings. The original intention had been to provide floodlighting for the all-weather pitch. This element had now just been withdrawn by the applicants. As a result there would be a consequential effect on the proposed community use, which would be necessarily limited in the winter, other than at weekends, whilst the daylight hours in the summer could enable the hours proposed to be relatively unaffected.
- (5) Objections had been received from Tonbridge and Malling BC as well as from 44 residents. A petition raising objection had also been received, signed by 229 people. The main concerns related to the residential amenity impact of the development, noise and lighting intrusion. The application was supported by Sport England, whilst the Environment Agency had raised no objection.
- (6) The site was bounded on three sides by residential properties. The housing to the east was mainly two-storey whilst Denbeigh Drive to the west was mainly bungalows (a resident said that there were also many bungalows in Hopgarden Road to the east).

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(7) The application site had been identified in the Tonbridge and Malling Local Plan as an area of Important Green Space. The proposed sports facilities would need to be enclosed with weldmesh fencing of varied height. The larger pitch fencing would be 3m high and 4.5 m behind the goalmouth areas. The smaller pitch would have 2.75m fencing.

(8) Cllr R A Dorling (Tonbridge and Malling BC) said that this application had been discussed by the Area 1 Planning Committee. As a result the Borough Council had objected on four grounds. These were: the lighting; the location of the hard pitch; the proposed hours of use – 365 days a year up to 10pm was totally unacceptable; the community use. He said that this was a pitch too far.

(9) Dr Robinson (KCC local Member) said that he was very keen indeed on providing sport opportunities for young people. However, on this occasion it was necessary to look very closely at the community use proposed. He did not believe that the application should be permitted in its current form. The multi-games area was intended to break through the 20m boundary zone from residential properties by going as close as 5m to properties in Stream Side (at the North West corner, next to Denbigh Drive). Therefore, another site was needed so that it was at least 20m away from all properties. However, if it was moved further south in order to achieve this, it would overlap the area set aside for the proposed all-weather pitch by 2m.

(10) Mr Horne explained that he was a Member of the Planning Applications Committee and also the local Member. He had received many letters relating to this development. To date, not a single one had been in favour of the development. The local residents felt that it was provocative and intrusive. In particular they resented the community use. Keeping the site open 365 days a year (including Sundays and Bank Holidays) was ridiculous. There would need to be a limit on the hours of use. He was amazed that the applicants expected that only 25 people would be at the all weather pitch at any one time since matches were often watched by friends and relatives. This could happen at any time including late in the evening and at weekends.

(11) Mr Fordham (Verry Construction) said that the main reason they were present was so that they could listen to people's views. He asked people to remember that Hugh Christie had a great tradition of athletics, as Kelly Holmes had been a pupil at the School.

(12) Mr Rogers (Scott Brownrigg) said that they would be undertaking an acoustic assessment to determine what the noise levels associated with the application were likely to be.

(13) Cllr Miss Browne (Tonbridge and Malling BC) said that she had been a Governor at the School for 21 years. There had always been difficulties between development at the School and the needs of local residents. The School now had state of the art buildings and the pupils needed as many possibilities for sport as possible. On the other hand, local residents were arguing that noise arising from this sport would become an intolerable imposition. She asked whether the Borough Council would be able to consider the amended application before it was put before the KCC Planning Applications Committee. Mr Crossley confirmed that this would be the case.

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(14) The Chairman invited comments and questions from the public. These are summarised below:-

(a) As the only access to the School would be along White Cottage Lane, there would be a massive amount of parking along it. Would there be supervision when the games finished at the end of the evening? Mr Crossley replied that the School's parking would double up for community use. There would also be supervision during the community use periods as they would be structured activities via formal lettings.

(b) A resident of Hopton Road said that he lived behind the School car park, where the gym and tennis courts were located. The problems of traffic and noise were ever present and would grow if permission were granted.

(c) The fact that White Cottage Road was now the only road with vehicular access to the School meant that this application would contribute to an already unbearable traffic and parking situation in a very narrow road. It should be born in mind that there were a large number of elderly local residents. There was also a risk to children and other pedestrians.

(d) At present, there was only a brief window from mid July to the end of August when local residents could enjoy their gardens undisturbed. If this application were approved, even this short period of tranquillity would disappear.

(e) The applicants proposed community use. However, given that most of the local residents were beyond the age when they would readily take up sport, there was a question as to who would actually use these facilities. It was quite possible that use would be very limited. If this was the case, the School would run the risk of wasting a lot of energy resources to provide unwanted facilities for the community. This was already happening with the other sports areas on site, which were floodlit.

(f) The School did not have a good history of compliance with planning control. Since the new car park was near the site boundary, the proposed facilities would lead to greater noise pollution caused by slamming doors, music and aggressive behaviour.

(g) The need for additional community sports was not that great in Tonbridge. There were quite a few pitches all over Tonbridge, including Hayesbrook School.

(h) A resident from Denbeigh Drive said that youngsters were already using the tennis court to kick footballs around. They were kicking the ball so hard that she and her neighbours had a constant worry about damage to their property.

(i) Would the community use be free of charge or would it operate as a commercial enterprise? Mr Crossley replied that this would be a matter for the School. Generally speaking, local sports groups paid the School for letting them use their sports facilities. Kent County Council encouraged all its schools to make their facilities available, subject to the basic amenity tests.

(j) A resident said that it was unlikely that use of the all weather pitch would be limited to 25 players and spectators. He, for example had recently been to Hawkenbury where there had been over 250 people present with 85 cars in the car park. The noise from their activity had continued until 11pm. This would be unacceptable at Hugh Christie due to the age of many residents. An additional worry

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was that youngsters would clamber over the fence into people's gardens in order to retrieve lost balls, etc.

(k) An application to extend the old sports hall had been refused in December 1998 on the grounds of bulk and proximity to local residents. This proposed development was even nearer to the bungalows. Furthermore, it was intended to keep the all weather pitch open for use until 10pm. If this happened, who would actually police it and close the ground at this time?

(l) Mr Burton (Assistant Principal) informed the meeting that the School was only responsible for the site until 6pm. The Tennis courts were leased to the Tennis Club after that time. Any complaints about misuse of the site should be passed to them. He would undertake to make them aware of any complaints that were made to him.

(m) One house was within 5m of the proposed pitch. Others were also within the 20m boundary zone. They would be subjected to increased noise in the evening and at weekends and would not be able to enjoy their environment. Once the all weather pitch was constructed, there would inevitably be tournaments involving parents, friends and relatives. There would be an increase in the amount and volume of bad language, which was already such a problem that people were driven indoors. The weldmesh fencing would also make the entire site look like a prison camp.

(n) Sleeping policemen had been put in along Thorpe Avenue but not along White Cottage Road. This had been because the bus drivers had objected that they would be bad for their backs. As a result cars sped along at 60mph whilst vehicles mounted the grass verges to pass one another. No development of the nature proposed should be permitted without a control system along this road. Mr Crossley confirmed that planning applications could be refused on highways grounds.

(15) The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The application was likely to be reported to the Committee on 20 March or 17 April. The notes of this meeting would be appended to the report.

(16) Following the meeting, Members of the Committee viewed the site of the proposed development, accompanied by some of the residents.