

Foodlit all weather pitch and extension of an existing non-floodlit multi-use games area at The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 19 June 2007.

Application by Kent County Council and Kent Education Partnership for the provision of a single, floodlit all-weather pitch and the extension of an existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, in connection with the comprehensive redevelopment of the school site previously approved by application refs: AS/05/1329 and AS/04/1708, at The North School, Essella Road, Ashford.

Recommendation: Permission be granted subject to conditions.

Local Member(s): George Koowaree

Classification: Unrestricted

Site

1. The North School is located just outside of the Ashford town centre on the eastern side of the town and is within the Ashford, Henwood Ward. The site can be accessed via Essella Road and Mabledon Avenue. The site is located within an established residential area and the site includes a number of one and two storey buildings set within open school grounds. The proposed all-weather pitch would be located to the south of the new school buildings permitted under planning permission AS/04/1708 and AS/05/1329. The existing multi-use games area is located to the north west of the school buildings. The school buildings themselves are clustered within the north eastern portion of the site with the whole site being bounded by mature trees. There are railway lines and an access road to a commercial site to the south of the site, beyond the existing playing field. A site plan is attached.

Background

2. The North School site was one of the schools involved in the Kent County Council Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Scheme, which aimed to establish a new North School and to provide a high quality new build to meet the needs of the modern school curriculum. The application (AS/04/1708) was considered by the Planning Applications Committee in December 2004, where Members resolved to grant planning permission subject to conditions.
3. The current sports pitch proposal was not included within the original PFI scheme, however it forms an important part of the overall modernisation of the school's facilities.
4. As a result of comments received during the public consultation process, and objections raised by Ashford Borough Council, the applicant has submitted amendments to the proposal, moving the location of the all-weather pitch further southwards, and further away from residential properties. It is these amendments which shall be discussed throughout this Report.

Item D3

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

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Proposal

5. The application proposes the provision of a single, floodlit all-weather pitch (AWP) and the extension of an existing non-floodlit multi-use games area (MUGA) in connection with the comprehensive redevelopment of the school site previously permitted under applications AS/05/1329 and AS/04/1708.
6. The all-weather pitch would employ artificial turf surfacing, which would be filled with sand to provide a safe and realistic surface. The pitch would be enclosed by a 3.0m high weld mesh fencing (the lower 1.2m of the proposed fencing would have an integrated ball rebound element). Close panelled fencing to be provided at the north and west enclosures of the AWP would be the same height as the weld mesh fencing. The perimeter fencing would be raised to 4.5m high for distance of 30m behind each goal in order to minimise disruption to play and surrounding uses. The proposed MUGA would be enclosed by a 2.75m high weld mesh fence. The amendments also now include the provision of an acoustic fence in the north west corner of the proposed all-weather pitch, in order to reduce potential noise impact on residential properties along Mabledon Avenue.
7. Lighting of the proposed AWP would be provided by twenty 2kw metal halide flood lamps mounted on eight 15m high galvanised steel, octagonal raise/lower columns. The floodlighting columns and lamp units would be finished in neutral light grey colours and designed according to the applicant to reflect the modern, contemporary appearance of the new school buildings. The floodlights would be set at 350 lux.
8. Access to the proposed AWP and extension to the MUGA would be provided by an approximately 3.5m wide pathway connecting the entrances to each area to the remainder of the school site. Pedestrian access to the AWP would be provided by two 1.2m wide single gates whilst access for maintenance would be provided by a double 3.0m wide gate.
9. The proposed access route ensures that the two areas are within easy walking distance from the school, whilst the gates ensure that sports could be properly contained once play is under way.
10. The expected number of people involved in an activity, eg. players, trainers and spectators, would vary on a day to day basis. However, the maximum number of people using the AWP at any one time is expected to be 25 and the non playing personnel outside the AWP fencing is expected to be up to 10 persons. The facility is proposed for community and school use both on weekdays and at weekends. The expected school use would be during core school hours during term time, Monday to Friday, and the expected community use would be 1800 to 2200 hours on weekdays and 0900 to 2200 hours on weekends.

Planning Policy

11. The Development Plan Policies listed below are relevant to the consideration of the application:

- (i) **The Kent & Medway Structure Plan, 2006:**

Policy SP1 – Seeks to conserve and enhance Kent's environment and

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

ensure a sustainable pattern of development.

Policy QL1 – All development should be well designed and be of high quality.

Policy QL12 – Provision will be made to accommodate additional requirements for local community services, including school developments.

Policy QL15 – All major new formal recreation and sports facilities should be designed to avoid nuisance from traffic, noise and lighting.

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

(ii) **Ashford Borough Local Plan, 2000:**

Policy GP5 – Seeks to ensure that the community facilities and infrastructure needed to cater for a growing population are provided when required.

Policy DP1 – Planning permission will not be granted for development proposals which are poorly designed.

Policy EN2 – Development proposals in or close to residential areas which are likely to damage significantly people's enjoyment of their homes will not be permitted.

Policy CF15 – Proposals to provide for an increased range of community uses will be permitted.

Consultations**12. Ashford Borough Council:** raises objection to the proposal for the following reasons:

- The proposed floodlighting, by virtue of its siting and height, would give rise to unacceptable levels of light spillage and pollution which would be detrimental to the residential amenity of the occupants of the eastern side of Mabledon Avenue and would be harmful to the visual amenity of the surrounding area.
- The proposed all weather pitch, by virtue of its proposed use until 22.00 hours, would result in unacceptable levels of noise and disturbance to the detriment of the amenity to the occupants of the eastern side of Mabledon Avenue.

Note that no further views have been received following the submission of the Amended Acoustic Assessment.

Sport England: does not raise objection to the proposal and welcomes the extension of the MUGA and development of an AWP, subject to a condition requesting the submission of a Community Use Scheme.

KCC's Lighting Consultants: consider the amended location of the all-weather floodlit pitch to be the preferred option from a lighting point of view.

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

“The moving of the AWP further to the south of the site has resulted in a drop of the lighting level on the rear windows of the houses in Mabledon Avenue compared to the earlier submission which was within permitted levels. The drop is greater for the houses away from the end of Mabledon Avenue.

“In addition, because the pitch is further south than the end of the road (Mabledon Avenue), the floodlight masts do not dominate the rear view from these houses, and also the floodlights would not be in a direct line view”.

KCC’s Environmental Consultants: initially considered that the acoustic assessment was lacking in relevant information, including detail on background noise, measurements on noise level of actual sports provided and the assessment had not considered the peak noise levels associated with the use of such a pitch.

Concern was raised by the Consultants regarding the effect of evening and weekend use on those residents living nearby, and the use of their gardens. Without any meaningful information on background noise levels during these times the Consultants could not say whether this proposal would cause detrimental noise disturbance to nearby residents. In particular, there is a need to ensure that the maximum noise levels from the associated use of the proposal are acceptable at these properties.

In response to the receipt of an Amended Acoustic Assessment, the Noise Consultants has since confirmed that with the close boarded fence and weld mesh fencing in position, noise levels from the all-weather pitch should not affect the aural amenity of the closest noise sensitive receptors.

Should consent be given, the Noise Consultants would like to see conditions imposed that would ensure that the proposed acoustic fence is in addition to (and placed outside of) the proposed mesh fencing, to reduce the impact of the noise from balls hitting the fence.

Divisional Transportation Manager: has no objections to the proposals.

Environment Agency: has no objections to the proposals.

Network Rail: No comments received.

Local Member

13. The local County Member, Mr G. Koowaree was notified of the application on the 20 November 2006.

Publicity

14. The application was publicised by the posting of two site notices and the notification of 139 neighbouring properties.

Representations

15. 2 letters of representation have been received. The main concerns and objections are as follows:

- The floodlighting may intrude into residents’ back gardens and windows.

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

- Not objecting to the all-weather pitch but am concerned over floodlighting.
- It would be “like living next to a football stadium (without the spectators)”.
- Privacy for neighbouring residents would be invaded.
- “Given that the existing pitches are hardly used, what benefit is a floodlit pitch?”

Discussion

16. This application needs to be determined with regard to the relevant Development Plan Policies and in the light of any other material planning considerations, including relevant planning objections raised by consultees and through publicity, set against the need for the proposed development.

Policy

17. The key Policies for consideration regarding the proposed development are SP1 (environment), QL12 (community), QL15 (sports facilities) and NR5 (noise and light intrusion), as summarised in paragraph (4) above. Given that the proposals are located within an existing area which has long been used to accommodate education and sporting uses, I consider that the principle of the development accords with Policies SP1, QL12 and QL15. However, I consider that there are detailed aspects to these proposals, such as the amenity implications of the noise and siting issues, that need to be addressed.
18. Overall, I consider that the proposed development is in general accordance with the relevant Development Plan Policies and I see no overriding objection on planning policy grounds. In particular, the proposed development has been amended since its submission, moving the location of the pitch further away from residential properties, and meaning that any light intrusion would be reduced. In addition, the proposed new sports pitches themselves would provide the School with much needed extra and improved sports facilities for both curricular use and use by the local community.

Siting

19. Following the amendments to the application, the all-weather pitch would be sited to the south west of the site, on the existing playing field, and further away from residential properties along Mabledon Avenue and the school buildings themselves. The amendments also pull the AWP further away from the proposed extended MUGA and sports hall, located to the north of the site. Access to the pitches are interlinked by a pedestrian footpath. The proposed location allows the running track and other field sport areas to remain. The site is not within any designated or protected areas, however the impact on floodlighting and noise in this area has been raised as an issue (to be discussed below), which has influenced the amended siting of the all-weather pitch.
20. The proposed site for the floodlit pitch is already used for sports and as a school games field, and although an all-weather pitch is now proposed, the use of the site would primarily remain unchanged. Additionally, Sport England has not raised objection to the proposed amended siting of the proposed floodlit pitch.
21. Despite the amendments, concerns have still been raised with regard to the potential noise impact of the pitch and disturbance from the proposed floodlighting associated

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

with it. However, I consider that the applicant has sufficiently demonstrated that by moving the pitch (by approximately 65m) further south of the playing field the impact of

22. the pitch would be significantly reduced. Previously the all-weather pitch was proposed to be located nearer to properties in Mabledon Avenue and also the school buildings. I therefore consider the amended siting of the pitch to be the most appropriate, especially given that the light spill into residential areas would be greatly reduced compared to the previously proposed position.

Noise

23. The floodlit pitch would be in close proximity to a number of residential properties, the nearest being located towards the end of Mabledon Avenue (see attached plans). I acknowledge that the noise emanating from the proposed floodlit pitch, including noise from spectator or crowd participation, has the potential to be experienced at the closest of these properties. However, I would advise that the potential for an increase in noise occurring would be minimal. The area is an existing playing field and currently there are no hours of use restrictions on its use. Therefore there is currently the potential for the playing field to be used in the summer up to 2230 hours. Whilst there is the potential for the playing field to be used more in winter months, through the introduction of floodlighting, during this time it is more likely that residents and neighbours of the school site would be indoors and therefore less exposed to noise disturbance from the playing fields.
24. Noise impact has been raised as a concern by Ashford Borough Council. The application as submitted was accompanied by an acoustic assessment. In considering the proposal, the County Council's own Noise Consultants raised concern that the submitted Noise Assessment did not demonstrate that the impacts of noise emissions from the new all-weather pitch would not cause a detrimental impact, both during school hours and when being used by the community outside of school hours and at weekends. The applicant has therefore submitted an Amended Noise Assessment taking into account those issues raised by the County Council's Noise Consultants (in paragraph 12 above), and proposed an acoustic screen in the north west corner of the site which would reduce noise disturbance. In the light of the fuller assessment and revision, the County Councils' Consultant has confirmed that the noise impacts on neighbouring properties would be acceptable.
25. Under the circumstances, I consider that given that the applicant has amended the siting of the pitch to move it further away from residential properties and proposed to include acoustic screening in the north west corner of the pitch, that there should not be an overriding concern that noise might be detrimental to residential amenity. Whilst there is the potential for the use of the pitch to be audible in the surrounding area, any increase in noise intrusion that might occur as a result of the use of the floodlit pitch is not significant enough on its own to warrant refusal of this application. However, additional mitigation measures to reduce noise disturbance further could be addressed via the use of a planning condition to control the hours and days that the pitch would be available for use.

Lighting

26. The all-weather pitch would be lit using eight 15m galvanised steel, octagonal demountable columns with metal halide flood lamps. The floodlights would sit in "close to flat" glass lanterns (at a 70° tilt) and oriented to reduce light glare and spillage and to produce no direct upward wasted light. The lamps would produce a white light ideal for

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

sports. These would be aimed to produce a maintained average of 350 Lux, appropriate to the type of games to be played. Due to the design of the floodlights there would be no

light spill above the horizontal. The 15 metre high columns could also be lowered for maintenance purposes.

27. Consideration has been given regarding the potential effect of the lighting on nearby residential properties and on the local area. The amendments submitted have moved the proposed pitch further away from neighbouring properties along Mabledon Avenue, which were originally likely to be affected by light spill into their back gardens. As a result of this re-siting, minimal light spill would reach into the closest properties. According to the Assessment, 2 lux would fall just inside the nearest property's garden boundary and no lux levels would fall on to the facades of the properties themselves. The pitch would be 50m from the façade of the nearest property. The County Council's Lighting Consultants are satisfied that the changes made to the pitch's location has further mitigated any detrimental impact that would be experienced by neighbours and has stated that even the original location of the pitch would have meant that the lighting level on to these properties was within the permitted levels. The Lighting Consultant has also stated that the re-siting of the pitch would mean that there would be a greater drop in light spill for the houses further away from the end of Mabledon Avenue. Moreover, the floodlighting columns would no longer dominate the rear view of these houses, and the floodlights would no longer be in direct view of these residents.
28. No comments have been received from Network Rail regarding possible effects of lighting on the railway line south of the North School site. However, the lux levels shown on the plan on page D3.4 demonstrate that there should be no light spill on this area.
29. Despite the objection from Ashford Borough Council in relation to light pollution, given the Lighting Consultant's comments, I consider there to be no overriding objection on light pollution grounds in relation to this proposal. No representations have been received from those properties in Mabledon Avenue on the amendments, and I therefore consider the proposal to be acceptable in terms of lighting in the proposed position. Appropriate conditions could be attached to any planning consent controlling the use, installation and performance of the lighting itself.

Visual Impact and Landscaping

30. Due to the proposed location of the floodlights on the school site, there is the potential for them to be visible from the surrounding areas, particularly from the west of the site as the ground contours slope down in this location. The impacts would primarily be the daytime view of the 15m columns and the night time view of the floodlights when they are in use. The existing landscaping along the boundary of the site, adjacent to residential properties and the railway line already goes some way to screening the playing field from view. The existing trees and foliage being retained at the boundary to the school field and railway cutting would help hide the pitch from view within the residential gardens and act as a barrier to noise pollution. I consider that additional tree planting would reduce the impact on residential properties to low significance over time. I would therefore advise that a condition could be placed on any planning consent requiring the submission and implementation of a full landscaping scheme.
31. With regard to night time impact of the proposal, views of the facility in the immediate area would be limited to the floodlighting itself and the area illuminated by the floodlighting. Potentially, there could be views of luminaires from the wider urban area of Ashford. Due to the height of the floodlighting columns, it would be difficult to completely

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

screen the night-time impact of the development; however, additional planting once established would help to mitigate the impact in the localised area.

Hours of Use

32. The facility is proposed for community and school use both on weekdays and at weekends. The expected school use would be core hours Monday to Friday and the anticipated community use would be 1800 to 2200 hours on weekdays and 0900 to 2200 hours on weekends. Given the concerns raised by Ashford Borough Council regarding potential noise disturbance as a result of the pitch, I would advise that should Members be minded to permit the proposal the hours of use put forward by the applicant be reduced to 0800 to 2130 hours (instead of 2200) Mondays to Fridays, 0900 to 2130 hours (instead of 2200) on Saturdays and 0900 to 1300 hours (instead of 2200) on Sundays and Bank Holidays, which would enable the site to be vacated by a more reasonable hour, with a period of respite on Sunday and Bank Holiday afternoons and evenings.
33. If these restrictions were imposed there would be a reduction of 10 hours per week in total. The suggested restrictions would provide periods of respite for neighbouring residents from any noise and disturbance from the movement of vehicles as well as from the sports activities themselves. However, such restrictions would impact more on the use by the local community than by the School, since the latter would be primarily daytime use. Whilst there are no such controls over the hours of use of the rest of the playing fields and therefore other sporting activities taking place, it is the introduction of the floodlighting which would extend any potential nuisance into later and more unsocial hours; the extent of daylight would naturally restrict the use of the rest of the playing field.

Other Issues

33. The proposed fencing has also been amended to address concerns raised by consultees on the original proposal, and in particular the County Council's Noise Consultant. No concerns have been raised following these changes. The lower 1.2m of the proposed weld mesh fencing now includes an integrated ball rebound element and, as such, it is not now necessary to provide a treated timber kickboard at the bottom of the fence, as was originally intended. I consider this to be of benefit to the overall visual amenity.
34. The closed panelled fencing to be provided at the north and west enclosure of the all-weather pitch would be the same height as the weld mesh fencing and would be specified to have a surface mass of around 25g/m² as required by the acoustic assessment to further reduce any potential noise impacts caused by balls and sporting equipment.
35. No objections have been raised regarding the extension of the Multi-Use Games Area. That area is currently used as a multi-use games area, and the extension would create a larger area for sports activities to take place. The proposed extended area currently has school buildings located there, however these were given consent for demolition under consents AS/04/1708 and AS/05/1329. Sport England is keen to promote as much sports and playing field space on the school site as possible, and the extension of the MUGA would greatly benefit the school.

Floodlit all weather pitch and extension of existing non-floodlit multi-use games area, The North School, Ashford – AS/06/2277

Conclusion

36. The application has to be considered in the context of the Development Plan and in relation to the location of the proposed development, set against the impacts of the proposal and the need for it. Overall, I consider that the proposal generally accords with the key Development Plan Policies. However, a number of concerns have been raised about the impacts of the development particularly relating to noise, lighting and proximity to residential properties. I acknowledge that there would be an increase in noise, lighting and that the proposed floodlighting would impact on nearby residential properties, although I consider that that would only be to a small degree. Under the circumstances, I consider that these issues do not warrant refusal of the application and that the imposition of conditions would assist in mitigating the impacts of the development to an acceptable level. In this particular case, I consider that the benefits of the facility would outweigh any potential increase in harm as a result of the proposed development. I therefore consider the development to be acceptable in planning land use terms and I recommend accordingly.

Recommendation

37. I RECOMMEND that PERMISSION BE GRANTED, SUBJECT TO conditions including:

- the development being carried out strictly in accordance with the approved plans and specifications
- the inspection of the installed lighting by a qualified lighting engineer to ensure its correct specifications and performance
- hours of use of the pitch and floodlights to be 0800 to 2130 hours Monday to Friday, 0900 to 2130 hours on Saturdays and 0900 to 1300 hours on Sundays and Bank Holidays
- the floodlights being extinguished when not required for all or part of the pitch and operated at the proposed lux levels when required
- the proposed acoustic fence being installed in addition to (placed outside of) the proposed mesh fencing
- details of surface materials for the proposed MUGA to be submitted prior to works on site being carried out
- the submission of a Community Use Scheme for the proposed sports facilities
- the submission and implementation of a landscaping and boundary treatment scheme.

Case officer – Helena Woodcock

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Background documents - See section heading
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