Horsham Blueprint Neighbourhood Forum

[redacted]

5 July 2023

Ms Amanda Wilkes
Senior Planning Officer
Horsham District Council
Parkside
Chart Way
Horsham
RH12 1RL

Dear Ms Wilkes

Planning application DC/22/2257
Conversion of stadium pitch to 3G surface with new perimeter paths, fencing, floodlighting and goal storage area - Horsham YMCA Football Club, Gorings Mead

I apologise for the late submission of these comments.

Our Steering Committee has carefully considered this application with particular reference to the policies contained within the Horsham Blueprint Business Neighbourhood Plan adopted by HDC in December 2022.

Football has been played on this site since 1929 and the facility forms an important part of the town's sports infrastructure. It is important that its future is secured and that, as far as possible, it is able to respond to changing needs within the sport. However, the site is severely constrained by its size and location, adjacent to housing and at the end of a partly narrow road, which itself has a difficult junction with the A281 Brighton Road. These have given rise to local concerns about the intensification of use of the site which would result from the installation of a 3G surface.

The application is consistent with, and provides support for, a number of objectives and policies within the Neighbourhood Plan, including:

> Objective 3 - " To protect and improve community, recreational, sporting and leisure facilities and be an integrated, balanced and resilient community, catering for diverse and changing needs across all age and social groups."
>
> Policy HB1 C - "Proposals should make the best use of suitable brownfield land, where available, before greenfield land adjacent to or beyond the built up area boundary is released."

Policy HB1 D - "Proposals must demonstrate that they are water neutral to prove that there is no adverse impact on the integrity of the Arun Valley SAC/SPA and Ramsar site." (There is likely to be an overall saving in the water used).

Policy HB13 A - "In order to provide for the increased need for leisure provision to support the growing population of the neighbourhood area, development proposals that deliver the following shall be strongly supported:

(ii) - The upgrading of existing sports pitches and facilities, including Millais School's all-terrain pitch to incorporate a 3G (or higher specification) pitch."

Policy HB14B states that proposals for new/improved community facilities will be encouraged subject to the following criteria:

I. the proposal would not have significant harmful impacts on the amenities of surrounding residents and the local environment; and

II. the proposal would not have significant adverse impacts upon the local road network; and

III. sufficient associated storage space and adequate parking space is provided.

It is here that the issues surrounding this application become matters of judgment of scale and overall public benefits and disbenefits.

Taking criterion 'I' first, there are two specific issues - the impact on the amenities of surrounding residents and on the local environment. The application suggests that while there would be an intensification of use with an all-weather playing surface. The Club expects the number of events to increase but not the number of individuals attending each event. In other words there would be more people spread over a larger number of events across the year. Overall what is proposed would not be inconsistent with the site's well established use as a football ground with associated club facilities. We support the recommendations by HDC's Environmental Protection Officer for the attachment of planning conditions which would help to minimise inconvenience to local residents. Overall, therefore we do not consider that there would be significant harmful impacts on the amenities of surrounding residents.

As for the environment, paragraph 8.8 of the Neighbourhood Plan says: "Planning permission should also be refused for any development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats such as veteran trees ….. unless the need and benefits of development in that location clearly outweigh the loss". The proposals will unfortunately result in the unavoidable loss of a veteran ash tree but we consider that in this case the overall benefits of the 3G pitch clearly outweigh the loss of this tree. We suggest that the tree could be used to create a lasting memorial such as a 'totem pole' describing Horsham to be erected in Chesworth Farm which is adjacent to this site, or the wider town area.

Turning to criteria ‘II’ and ‘III’, the issue is whether the proposals would have significant adverse impacts on the local road network and the provision of adequate parking space.

Objective 4 of the Plan (“To ensure that development is well designed, is in keeping with local character and does not put adverse pressure on the roads, publicly available car parking and other services and infrastructure.”), and Policy HB12: “Encouraging sustainable movement", underscore the importance of this issue.

There is limited on-site car parking, some of which is already let to local companies on weekdays. In this case this would be advantageous as it would continue to act as a cap on the volume of traffic along Gorings Mead. The junction between Gorings Mead and the A281 Brighton Road is problematic for vehicles turning into and out of Gorings Mead. The entrance is narrow and offers potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles at busy times. But the application does not envisage additional large events which would create the same conditions as are currently found on match days. Furthermore, we note that the Highway Authority does not believe that the proposals would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

We also note that the Club has produced a Travel and Transport Plan which seeks to address these issues, including the appointment of an Operations Manager. A critical factor is the degree to which the Travel and Transport Plan, which seeks to reduce travel by car, would realistically be applicable to the new, albeit possibly relatively small, events that will come with the 3G pitch. We consider that the preparation and maintenance of a comprehensive Travel and Transport Plan which actively discourages all travel by car and seeks to minimise potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles within the narrow parts of Gorings Mead and the site, should be a condition of any planning consent.

If the Council is minded to approve this application we ask that it be subject to a condition relating to the Travel and Transport Plan, as outlined above, and the conditions proposed by the Environmental Protection Officer.

Yours sincerely

John Steele

(Chair, Steering Committee)