

Reference: 22/01673/FUL	Site: Belhus Park Golf And Country Park Belhus Park Lane Aveley RM15 4PX
Ward: Aveley and Uplands	Proposal: Construction of new 3G football pitch, spectator area and 4.5m high fencing.

Plan Number(s):		
Reference	Name	Received
DWG_BS_000_P1	Existing Site Location Plan	19.01.2023
DWG_BS_100_P2	Existing Plan	14.12.2022
DWG_00_100_P2	Proposed Plan	14.12.2022

The application is also accompanied by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering letter • Heritage Statement • Velocity Sports Surfaces, 13 July 2023 (ref JB-311-2) • Proposed Heads of Terms, 13 July 2023 	
Applicant: Group 1 Automotive and Grays Athletic Football Club	Validated: 27 January 2023 Date of expiry: 14 July 2023 (Extension of time agreed)
Recommendation: Refuse planning permission	

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 At the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 6 April 2023 Members voted to undertake a site visit before any Officer presentation, questions or debate of the proposal. A site visit was also agreed (following the presentation, questions and debate) for the associated Thurrock Football Club application (ref 22/01672/FUL). The report below summarises any further consultation responses and planning updates.

1.2 The site visit took place on 5th July 2023.

- 1.3 A copy of the reports presented to the April and July Committee meeting are attached as appendices.
- 1.4 At the July Planning Committee 13 July 2023 this application was deferred to resolve a certificate of ownership issue which invalidated the application. The correct notice has now been served which the agent confirmed by email.

2.0 CONSULTATION UPDATES

- 2.1 Since the April Committee report was published, a consultation response was received from the Council's Sports Development Policy Manager as follows:

“Thurrock’s Playing Pitch needs assessment and subsequent Strategy identifies the need for additional 3G pitches within Thurrock and specifically identifies Belhus Park Leisure Centre as a recommended site.

With regard to this application, I understand that a contribution of £500k would be made available from a linked development for a 3G pitch at Belhus Park Leisure Centre. However, the current estimated cost of building a 3G pitch is in the region of £900k. With this in mind, and with the lack of information within the application regarding the size, specifications and quality of the pitch, it makes it very difficult to assess whether this proposal would be suitable, have longevity and meet identified needs.

The application does not appear to include permission for pitch floodlighting which would be essential for evening use during the winter months. No reference has been made to how floodlighting would be provided or who would be providing it. However, without floodlighting (and planning permission for floodlighting), a 3G pitch would not meet the needs identified with Thurrock Playing Pitch Strategy.”

- 2.2 There have been no further consultation since the July Committee, however Officers are currently awaiting further comment from Sport England and Thurrock Council's Sports Development Policy Manager, since the applicant has presented further information regarding the costings of the proposed 3G pitch provided Velocity Sports Surfaces. This has been submitted, as the applicant disputes the indicative costing presented by Thurrock Sports Manager from the July Committee updates.
- 2.3 Below is a table of indicative costings for an artificial grass pitch;

Floodlit 3G Football Pitch	Indicative costings
Thurrock Council	£900,000 approx.
Sport England	£1,130,000 approx
Applicant	£570,000

- 2.4 Clearly there are discrepancies between the suggested figures for the costing of the playing pitch, which begs the question as to whether the applicant's proposed contribution for the loss of the playing fields within the Thurrock Football Club application (22/01672/FUL) would be sufficient mitigation.
- 2.5 At the time of the April Committee, the applicant proposed a contribution of £500,000. Following the submission of the Velocity costing report, the applicant has now increased their contribution to the playing pitch to £570,000 (associated with 22/10672/FUL). Another pertinent question is; if the joint applicant is offering s106 contribution of £570,000 towards the provision of a 3G pitch at Belhus Park, is the current application necessary.
- 2.5 Nevertheless, Officers are currently awaiting an updated response from Sport England and Thurrock Leisure for an updated response.
- 2.6 As it currently stands, the issue of floodlighting is salient and the application does not reference to the inclusion of floodlighting. Therefore, floodlighting has not been assessed as part of the current application, hence the first reason for refusal. If the applicant intends for the 3G football pitch to be floodlight, then this cannot be considered within the current submission, as the application has not considered the implications of the lighting apparatus. A revision to the planning application and further re-consultation would be required.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The recommendation remains one of refusal for the reasons stated in 9.0 of the April Committee report.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Committee is recommended to refuse planning permission for the following reasons:

1. The application is not accompanied by sufficient detail regarding proposed

pitch layouts, pitch design specifications, details of pedestrian and maintenance access and floodlighting to enable the local planning authority and Sport England to make an adequate assessment of whether the proposals provide adequate mitigation for the proposed loss of existing playing fields at the former Thurrock Football Club site. Consequently, the proposals are contrary to paragraph no. 99 of the NPPF and policies CSTP20 and PMD5 of the Thurrock Core Strategy and Policies for the Management of Development 2015.

2. As no mechanism has been provided by the application, which guarantees the delivery of the proposed 3G pitch, the local planning authority cannot conclude whether any public benefits of the proposals outweigh the identified harm to the Grade II Belhus Park Registered Park and Garden. The proposal is therefore contrary to paragraph no. 202 of the NPPF.

Informative(s)

1. Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) - Positive and Proactive Statement:

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern with the proposal and determining the application within a timely manner, clearly setting out the reason(s) for refusal, allowing the Applicant/Agent the opportunity to consider the harm caused and whether or not it can be remedied by a revision to the proposal. The Local Planning Authority is willing to liaise with the Applicant/Agent to discuss the best course of action and is also willing to provide pre-application advice in respect of any future application for a revised development.

Documents:

All background documents including application forms, drawings and other supporting documentation relating to this application can be viewed online:

www.thurrock.gov.uk/planning

