

WELWYN HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN (2013-32)- EXAMINATION

STAGE 4 HEARING STATEMENT PREPARED BY SPORT ENGLAND:

Matter 6: Settlement Policies

SADM 21 Housing allocations in Welwyn Garden City – HS6: Land at Gosling Sports Park

Introduction

Sport England is a non-departmental public body which leads on the delivery of the Government's community sports strategy and represents the interests of community sport through the planning system. Sport England is also a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting playing fields. Further detail of our work and the organisation can be found on our website <https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/>.

Question 17: In an era of increasing leisure time and sports participation how can the loss of sports facilities at this location be seen to be in accordance with National Policy at Section 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework?

As set out in detail in Sport England's representations on the local plan pre-submission consultation, it has not been demonstrated that the loss of sports facilities at Gosling Sports Park that would result from the delivery of this allocation would accord with the Framework especially paragraph 74 as no replacement provision is proposed and it has not been demonstrated that the facilities are surplus to requirements. However, as set out in response to question 18, Welwyn Hatfield Council are seeking to address this matter.

Question 18: In the absence of any assessment for community requirements for dry skiing and golf driving within the evidence base, how is the loss of these sports/recreation facilities justified?

As set out in Sport England's representations on the local plan pre-submission consultation, the Council's existing assessment of sports facility needs in the Welwyn Hatfield Sports Facility Study (OSC/3) did not assess the community's needs for ski-ing or golf facilities. Consequently, there is no robust assessment of needs currently available to inform whether the facilities are surplus to requirements or whether they need to be retained or replaced in order to accord with paragraphs 73 and 74 of the NPPF.

Since the local plan submission was published in 2016, the Council has (in 2017) commissioned a new sports facilities strategy that will include an assessment of needs for both ski-ing and golf facilities. When completed this study is expected to help inform whether these facilities need to be protected or whether they are surplus to requirements and therefore do not need to be retained or replaced. The strategy will also be expected to consider the needs for the other facilities at Gosling Sports Park and make recommendations for the future of these facilities individually and collectively. However, this strategy is still under preparation and it is understood that the assessment of needs will not be completed and available during the local plan examination period. It is therefore not possible to reach an informed view at this stage on the need to protect the facilities. Consequently, the loss of the facilities has not been justified to date and in accordance with

paragraph 74 of the Framework, the site allocation (if maintained) should make provision for retaining or replacing the golf driving range and dry ski slope with equivalent/better facilities unless it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that the facilities are surplus to requirements.

Question 19. What complementary proposals are in place to relocate the lost facilities, for which there is a community need, elsewhere?

At present, there are not known to be any complementary proposals to relocate the lost facilities elsewhere.

As set out in our representations on the Local Plan Submission, the rationale for disposing of part of Gosling Sports Park to residential is understood to be to provide enabling development to secure the future of the remainder of the sports park and hopefully to facilitate investment into new/enhanced facilities and possibly replacement facilities to mitigate the loss of the ski slope and golf driving range. Sport England is sympathetic with the rationale as the existing facilities at the Sports Park are ageing and are understood to require significant investment to meet current needs and expectations and there is a risk with the long term sustainability of the whole sports park if such investment does not take place. Furthermore, if subsequent needs assessments demonstrate that the facilities are required for meeting community needs and therefore justify protection it may be possible to relocate them elsewhere on the sports park or off-site.

In this context, Sport England is willing to take a pragmatic approach to the site allocation. Therefore, in view of the current absence of evidence over whether the existing facilities that may be displaced need to be protected, as set out in our representations on the pre-submission local plan, if the residential site allocation is to be maintained in the plan it is considered necessary for the allocation policy to set out the policy requirements to guide development on the site to cover various scenarios in order to help ensure that any residential development allocation does accord with Government policy in section 8 of the Framework in practice, especially paragraphs 73 and 74. In summary, Sport England would suggest that the following policy requirements be added to the site specific considerations in Table 9 which supports allocation policy SADM 21:

- The dry ski slope and golf driving range would either need to be maintained in their current location, replaced elsewhere on the Gosling Sports Park or replaced off-site in a suitable location. Any replacement on-site or off-site would need to be equivalent or better in terms of quantity and quality and the phasing would need to ensure continuity of facility provision. The only exception to this requirement would be if it was satisfactorily demonstrated through a needs assessment (such as Council's emerging sports facility strategy or any subsequent detailed feasibility study) that the facilities were genuinely surplus to requirements in which case there would not be a need to retain or replace them as a development requirement;
- If it is demonstrated that the ski slope and golf driving range could be replaced or do not need to be retained/replaced, then a masterplan (supported by a sports facility needs assessment and business plan) should be submitted to and approved (by the Council) for the remaining area of Gosling Sports Park to guide future development and demonstrate how the proceeds from the disposal would be invested in enhancing and sustaining the sports park for the community. Provision would need to be made in any planning permission for the residential development for delivering the priorities for new and enhanced sports facilities identified in the masterplan for the sports park through a planning obligation.

- Residential development on the site would need to be sited and designed to avoid or at least minimise potential residential amenity impacts from the adjoining sports park facilities in relation to considerations including noise and lighting.

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