

WELWYN HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN (2013-32) - EXAMINATION

STAGE 4 HEARING STATEMENT PREPARED BY SPORT ENGLAND:

Matter 6: Settlement Policies

SADM 26 New Dwellings in Hatfield – HS9: Land at Howe Dell

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 41: Is the permanent loss of these playing fields justified and in accordance with local and national policy that seeks to promote and maintain areas of open space?

As set out in detail in Sport England's representations on the local plan pre-submission consultation, objection was made to the principle of the proposed residential allocation on site HS9 as it would involve the permanent loss of part of Onslow St Audrey School's playing fields.

From Sport England's perspective, there has been a change in circumstances since the local plan pre-submission consultation in 2016 because in 2017 a planning application (Ref: 6/2017/1641/MAJ) was submitted for redeveloping the playing field area covered by the site allocation for residential development together with proposals for new school facilities. Following significant engagement between Sport England and the applicant at pre-application stage and during the determination of the planning application, a mitigation package was agreed with Sport England for compensating for the loss of the playing fields. This involved the provision of a range of new and enhanced sports facilities on the site as part of the planning application including a sports hall, artificial grass pitch and refurbished tennis courts. Community access to all of the sports facilities would also be secured as part of the mitigation package. Sport England's formal response to the planning application is appended as Appendix 1 and provides the full detail. In summary, a departure from policy was considered to be justified on this occasion in relation to the residential element of the development due to the exceptional benefits offered by the new and enhanced sports facilities that were proposed as part of the development in the context of the limited role of the playing fields and games courts in meeting school and community needs for formal sport.

However, as at May 2018 the planning application has not been determined so there is no certainty at present whether the scheme proposed within the current planning application will be approved and subsequently implemented. In view of the uncertainty about the status of the current planning application, the local plan site allocation should set out the policy requirements for assessing proposals in relation to playing field impact so that in the event that the current application is not approved or implemented there are clear policy requirements in place for assessing any future planning applications.

Sport England's position on the loss of the playing without acceptable mitigation would remain as set out in our original representation i.e. an objection would be made as it would not accord with paragraph 74 of the Framework or Sport England's playing fields policy which is used for assessing planning applications to fulfil our statutory consultee role (and is based on paragraph 74 of the framework) – see <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/playing-fields-policy/> for details. However, as the current planning application has demonstrated that an acceptable mitigation package for the loss of the playing fields could be developed in principle, I would be prepared to make no objection to the principle of the allocation subject to the following requirement being added to the site specific considerations in Table 10 which supports policy SADM 26:

- Equivalent or better replacement playing field provision being made off-site, or alternatively, mitigation being made in the form of new and/or enhanced sports facilities that would be available for community use on the adjoining Onslow St Audrey School site where it can be demonstrated that the needs for the sports facilities clearly outweigh the loss of the playing fields.

It is considered that a policy requirement along the lines set out above would be consistent with the criteria in paragraph 74 of the Framework and provide a suitable policy framework for considering any future planning application against in relation to the loss of playing fields if the current planning application did not progress.

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