

52/2008/019

CSSC SPORTS AND LEISURE

ERECTION OF SPORTS CENTRE COMPRISING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR FACILITIES WITH PARKING, ACCESS, FOOTPATH/CYCLE ROUTE AND ASSOCIATED WORKS AT CIVIL SERVICE SPORTS CLUB GROUND, COLLEGE WAY, TAUNTON

321546/123357

FULL

52/2008/019

CSSC SPORTS & LEISURE

ERECTION OF SPORTS CENTRE COMPRISING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR FACILITIES WITH PARKING, ACCESS, FOOTPATH/CYCLE ROUTE AND ASSOCIATED WORKS AT CIVIL SERVICE SPORTS CLUB GROUND, COLLEGE WAY, TAUNTON AS AMPLIFIED BY AGENTS LETTER DATED 19TH JUNE 2008.

321546/123357

FULL

PROPOSAL

This revised submission follows a preceding application, planning reference 52/2007/037, for 'the erection of a sports centre, parking and access', previously withdrawn in order to address various issues that arose during the consideration of the scheme.

The existing Civil Service Sports Club (CSSC) buildings are served by an inadequate access with Trull Road and are located adjacent and to the north of Queens College. The agent states that the CSSC, who have occupied the site since the 1950's, is no longer viable in its current format with the facility scheduled to close later in 2008. In order to remain viable the vision is to provide the core outdoor facilities, with the introduction of a purpose built building to provide indoor leisure activities and facilities.

Permission is sought for the erection of a new sports club, built over two floors, with access off College Way, with provision for 122 parking spaces. The new building would be located at the western end of the existing site and the application site excludes the existing CSSC clubhouse, car park, and indoor bowls building. The purpose of the new facility is to provide a comprehensive use of the site with both indoor and outdoor facilities. The proposal would see the retention of the two football pitches, cricket square, together with a new all weather cricket pitch in compensation for the loss of a second cricket pitch, multi use games area, and archery area, while internally the facilities will include a beginners and main swimming pool, health and fitness studios, a gymnasium, sauna, crèche facility, ancillary café bar, sports bar,

changing rooms and showers as well as separate changing facilities for the outdoor sport use. The proposed opening times for members would be from 6.30am to 11.00pm. Existing members of CSSC will be given priority to membership with the remaining club capacity open to the wider community.

The planning statement details the revisions to the previous scheme as the following:-

1. Provision of a unilateral undertaking to provide public use of the outdoor facilities.
2. Revised visibility splay – this would account for the loss of two protected trees.
3. A new footpath/cycleway link between Trull Road and College Way.
4. Re-siting of the building slightly further within the site.
5. Removal of the proposed service road and compound in close proximity to Pitts Close to provide additional landscaping.
6. Repositioning of the sports pitches.
7. Confirmation of the inclusion of archery and the Multi Use Games Area within the scheme (red line amended).
8. Supplemented landscape scheme.

The application is also accompanied by a landscape assessment, an assessment of need and sequential test, as well as a transport assessment.

As previously highlighted the red line of the application site does not incorporate the existing CSSC buildings. The future use of that element of the site is considered to be a material consideration and will be discussed later within the report. However, for information purposes, the agent has confirmed that agreement has been reached with Queens College for their acquisition of the surplus CSSC premises and car park to the north, currently excluded from the application site.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY - I have the following observations on the highway aspects of this proposal:

Through discussions with the developer both pre-application, and since the submission of the previous application on this site, 52/2007/037, it was established that the proposed sports centre, was to be a direct replacement for the existing facility, currently served from Trull Road. Despite this issue being raised previously, there is no mention within the current application of the existing facility, and how this area of land is intended to relate to the current proposal.

The proposal seeks to gain access from College Way, a distributor road within the route hierarchy. It is usual that a distributor road does not serve private or individual points of access, and as such there is a presumption in terms of highway design against the provision of an access from College Way. This is specified in the adopted document, 'Estate Roads in Somerset – Design Guidance Notes'. It was suggested most strongly in my response to the previous application, that a balance

needed to be struck and that the aforementioned additional information was required.

This information has not been included as part of the application, and as such the Highway Authority continues to have concerns about the proposal, and would again request that further information be provided relating to the existing site, and its ongoing/future use, to enable a full assessment of the implications of the scheme.

The proposed vehicular access has been modified, and considering it in terms of detail alone, it is improved. The required visibility has now been agreed at 2.4m x 90m in both directions with no obstruction to visibility greater than 900mm above adjoining road level. This is achieved, and demonstrated on a survey drawing that has been supplied.

The drawing submitted as part of the Transport Assessment, number RLT/012/01'P4, shows an acceptable access layout, and a footway along the site frontage. This is accepted, but will need to be provided as part of a formal agreement with the highway Authority. It will also be necessary to agree a crossing point on College Way to the south of the access which will be furnished appropriately.

There is no mention within the submission of restricting parking along College Way, however this will need to be explored in the interests of highway safety, and can be done as part of any formal agreement.

As part of the response from the Highway Authority to the previous application, it was stated that the developer, provide an upgrade to the existing crossing facilities on Trull Road to link the cycle routes, as well as provide the pedestrian/cycle route through the site that is included in the LTP and Local Plan. I note that the link is shown in this submission, although there is concern at how users will interact with traffic to the existing site, as no information has been forthcoming about the future use of this land.

The layout of the pedestrian/cycle route is generally acceptable; however it is essential that there is a clear understanding of how this will be accessed, and of any conflicts that will occur, before the Highway Authority will be happy to progress with this.

Without the additional information that is required, the Highway Authority reluctantly recommends the refusal of this application for the following reasons:

- The Local Planning Authority and the Highway Authority in adopting the Somerset County Council publication 'Estate Roads in Somerset' have agreed standards for the design and layout of streets. The proposed access does not conform to these agreed standards and is not, therefore, adequate to serve the development proposed.
- Insufficient information has been submitted regarding the use of the existing buildings within the site, to satisfy the Highway Authority that the existing substandard access to Trull Road can be stopped up, the vehicular traffic removed, and the pedestrian/cycle link provided so that it is safe to use.

COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGIST there are limited or no archaeological implications to this proposal and we therefore have no objections on archaeological grounds.

WESSEX WATER a connection can be made to the foul sewer to the north. There is a public surface water sewer in the verge of College Way. Connection may be made to this but TDBC will limit the discharge to green field run off rate. The applicant is advised to consider SuDS techniques. In line with Government protocol the applicant is advised to contact Developer Services to see if drainage systems can be adopted under a Section 104 Agreement. The Sewage Treatment Works and terminal pumping station have spare capacity provided there is no trade waste being generated. There are water mains in the vicinity available for connection.

DRAINAGE OFFICER – I note that surface water from this proposal is to connect to a Wessex Water public sewer. No regard has been given to attenuating flows and the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) in this proposal. No approval should be given until a detailed surface water disposal plan has been submitted and agreed with the Authority.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER – the building and car parking, being located adjacent to College Way, will have a detrimental impact on the character of the 'Urban Open Space' EN24 and 'Recreational Open Space' C3 and even with landscape enhancement will in my opinion not be appropriate for this location.

LEISURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER – I have the following observations to make on this application. Whilst the applicant argues that the second cricket square on this site is in effect a square by default rather than by design the fact is that a second square existing on the site and it will be lost if the development is permitted to proceed.

At present games are played concurrently on the 2 squares and the provision of an artificial wicket on the edge of the main square is not sufficient replacement for the proposed loss. The outcome of the loss of this sport facility will be to displace a cricket team. TDBC has no cricket facilities suitable to accommodate a team having reduced the number of cricket pitches available for public use in recent years (since the public in 2003 of the Playing Pitch Strategy referred to by the applicant).

The offer of free 'off peak' use of the grass pitches is no compensation for the loss of this facility as in practice the 'offer' is likely to be taken up by few, if any, schools (and the second square is used by adult teams rather than young people).

In order not to object to this application on the grounds of a loss of sports facilities I would expect to see a formal agreement between Queens College and the Civil Service Sports Club that one cricket square on the Queens College site is made available for use by the teams currently using the CSSC site between suitable agreed dates.

Regardless of the benefits that the new club would undoubtedly bring to CCSC members the proposal means the loss of playing fields for both a building and car parking and the loss of trees for access. All of which is regrettable.

There seems to have been no consideration given to building on the existing site of the club and whilst this may be more 'difficult' to achieve I would have thought it would have been an option worth exploring especially if access could be gained from Hoveland Drive.

The applicant places great emphasis on the supposed 'latent demand' for health and fitness facilities in Taunton, yet there is little evidence to support this view. In fact, recent reports, including one from Strategic Leisure Ltd, indicate that the market may well be saturated (the relatively recent closure of Fitness First may have altered the picture to some extent but not fundamentally). This matter is unlikely to be a major factor in making a planning decision but should be ignored as it is speculation.

I object to this application on the grounds that it means the loss of a cricket pitch with the consequent displacement of at least one team. The alternative offered (an artificial pitch on the remaining square) is unacceptable. I also consider that building on the existing site should be explored rather than automatically proposed to build on the sports pitches.

Further comments in response to the provision of community use as set out by the agent, letter dated 19th June 2008. Comments awaited from Queens College before providing a comprehensive response. Nevertheless, the submission from the agent does not make it clear that there is a guarantee that displaced cricket teams for CSSC will have access to facilities at Queens on a Saturday afternoon (for instance) – it merely suggests a 'priority booking' situation that could in fact not solve the issue at all.

For clarity I would expect a guarantee that those teams currently playing at CSSC and displaced as a result of the proposed developments have guaranteed access to Queens College facilities at a level at least equal to that which they currently enjoy – for instance they forward their fixtures in April and these are guaranteed to be accommodated at Queens College without question.

SPORT ENGLAND: In commenting on applications we assess whether the proposal meets any of the 5 exceptions to our Playing Field Policy 'A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England'. This requires that:

'The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields.'

In order for the proposals to fully meet the requirements of E5 of our policy, we would wish to see the following requirements secured as part of any permission that is granted.

Loss of second cricket square

We note that there are two cricket squares on the site, and that the applicants have suggested (page 40 of the Planning Statement) that the second wicket is substandard and was developed by local users 'by default rather than design'. They

suggest that this loss can be replaced by the provision of a synthetic cricket wicket on the first square.

However, information provided by your Sports Services Manager suggests there is, from time to time, concurrent use by league teams of both cricket pitches at the CSSC ground on a Saturday, and as such at least one cricket team will be displaced if the development goes ahead without this issue being addressed.

The applicants have stated (para. 7.6 of the Planning Statement) that there is currently an agreement between Queens College and the CSSC which enables both parties to utilise each others facilities, particularly the sports pitches, and that this is intended to continue. The applicants have stated that the cricket facilities at Queens College will in the future be able to be used by future members of ROKO if the proposals were to go ahead. We consider that, for the application to be acceptable it will be essential to satisfactorily address the issue of accommodating displaced cricket teams that may wish to play when the remaining CSSC pitch is being used.

In order to achieve the above, we would request written confirmation from Queens College that the existing arrangements with the Civil Service Sports Club will continue once the ROKO club is established, or alternatively a requirement (by way of a planning condition or Section 106 Agreement) is included as part of any planning approval that is granted, along the following lines:

Condition A: The development hereby granted shall not be commenced until a Joint Use Scheme has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, after consultation with Sport England, for the use of an alternative cricket pitch that is at least as accessible and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality as the existing cricket pitch which will be lost as a result of the development. The scheme shall include details of location, pricing policy, days and hours of use, access by CSSC members and non-members, and include a mechanism for review. The approved Scheme shall be implemented upon commencement of use of the development.

Reason – To ensure the satisfactory quantity, quality and accessibility of compensatory provision which secures a continuity of use and to accord with LP Policy C3 and EN24).

Future management and maintenance of sports pitches

With regards to the sports pitches on the site, the applicants have indicated a willingness to provide assurances, either by condition or S106, that the pitches would be retained and continue to be made available for sports use following the development. We would therefore request that a planning condition is included as part of any planning approval that is granted along the lines of the following Sport England model condition.

Condition B: The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until a Management and Maintenance Scheme for the remaining sports pitches at the CSSC site has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, after consultation with Sport England. The Management and Maintenance Scheme shall be for a period of at least 10 years, and shall include management

responsibilities and a maintenance schedule. The measures set out in the approved scheme shall be complied with in full, with effect from commencement of use of the development, and shall include a mechanism for review.

(Reason – To ensure that the sports pitches on the site are managed and maintained to ensure sufficient benefit of the development to sport and to accord with Local Plan Policy C3 and EN24.

Subject to securing the above requirements as part of any planning approval that is granted, Sport England does not wish to object to this application, as we would be satisfied that the proposals would meet Exception E5 of our playing fields policy.

However, if the Council resolves to approve the proposed development without the above requirements being secured then Sport England would wish to object to this application.

Further comments in response to the provision of community use as set out by the agent, letter dated 19th June 2008 – Sport England are please to see some good progress has been made. However, as per the Council's leisure services department further details are required, in particular regarding priority for displaced CSSC teams.

PARISH COUNCIL – The Parish Council discussed the changes/amendments from the previous application, 52/2007/037, but felt quite strongly that these did not materially alter the original application. The Parish Council unanimously agreed to oppose the application for the following reason: -

1. The proposed Centre is an intrusion in the street scene and not in keeping with the present surrounds and surrounding area. Its location, size and appearance will have a detrimental impact on the residential area and will result in the substantial loss of a very important open aspect within a fully developed area. The proposal would appear to be contrary to your 'Urban Open Space' and 'Recreational Open Space' policies in the Local Plan.
2. The proposed two storey Centre building would not be in keeping with the residential and surrounding area. The high level of lighting would exacerbate this, especially as it is proposed to open the centre until 11.00pm, and incorporate large illuminated signage for the Centre.
3. There would be significant loss of green field and open aspect from exists at present and a loss of available sports facilities and playing area. This would be made worse by also losing the present indoor bowling facility. These losses would include the second cricket square towards College Way, which is used throughout the season and has been for a considerable number of years; a hockey pitch towards College Way, which for years has been marked out with the proper hockey goalposts and a third football pitch in front of the lit multi-purpose five-a-side hard court area.
4. The effects of the additional traffic on College Way and the College Way/Galmington Road junction, especially at Peak times during the day, i.e. school and work time in the mornings and evenings. Its proximity with Pitts Close will cause significant traffic flow problems on a junction that is already

very demanding with access to the local Primary School, Shops, Church, Community Hall and Doctor's Surgery. As a measure of the traffic problems that already exist, a controlled crossing was put in the vicinity. The Centre will only exacerbate these problems.

5. The proposed entrance/access to the Centre would need an agreed visibility splay, which will require the removal of existing trees. This would create additional traffic safety issues along College Way with the amount of traffic turning left and right off College Way, in order to enter and leave the Centre.
6. The Council have in the past discussed with Somerset County Council the possibility of a cycleway/footpath coming from Trull Road to College Way. The Council note that this has now been added and joins the existing footpath beside Fulwood Close. The Council would like to know who owns the land (grass strip) between the Civil Service fence and the footpath, where the two would have to merge and who would be responsible for upgrading the remainder of the footpath into a cycleway/footpath? In addition, the Council would like to know the legal responsibility and future maintenance of the proposed cycleway/footpath, as it is shown inside the security fence and therefore on Civil Service owned land.
7. The Council feel that there would be an additional problem created along College Way, because at present there is a barrier preventing cyclists and pedestrians from turning left towards Pitts Close. They have to go right to join the properly installed crossing, which was positioned there to prevent road safety problems opposite the Pitts Close junction (see 4 above). This could be exacerbated if the footpath or cycleway/footpath link is extended towards the entrance to the Sports Centre on the same side of the road.
8. The Council would need to be convinced that it was not possible to build the proposed Sports Centre in the same place or close to the existing Sports Club building and believe this requires further detailed consideration.

If however, the application were to be approved, the Council would expect to see a number of conditions imposed, even if they required further discussion with the Parish Council. These would include: -

1. Access to and from the site is of major importance to users of College Way.
2. The visual impact of the building on the surrounding area, its positioning would mean the loss of the present open visibility and rare aspect in a fully developed area.
3. The choice of building materials, the style and design of the building, and assurances of future control of structural changes and appearance.
4. The lighting of the new building and the size and wattage of the lit signage, especially in view of the proposed opening hours for the Centre.
5. The hours of business, especially the proposed closing time.

6. The protection, as far as possible, of a highly significant site in the Parish.
7. Security of the site, with the essential need for a barrier to be installed when the Centre is closed to prevent illegal use of the car park and site. There would also need to be further information on the type, materials and colour of the proposed security fence around the site.

CIVIC SOCIETY – raises concern to the application, mainly arising from the landscape impact and the effect of on College Way, together with doubts over the viability of the proposed business.

What is proposed appears to be a large shed, in gross outlines not unlike warehouse buildings found on business parks. This is completely at odds with the residential and retail development along College Way and because of its extra height cannot be said to relate to the existing single storey club buildings.

It appears that the existing club is in a degree of financial difficulty, so the proposal seems to be to transform it into a health and sports facility open to the general public (although the basis for this is unclear – there still seems to be a ‘membership requirement’). If it is thus opened on competitive terms then it benefits the Galmington & S-W quarter of the town with new facilities.

However, Taunton has a considerable number of similar establishments, all of which depend on their patrons’ discretionary expenditure, and we suggest that the possibility that the venture may fail must be considered. If so, what will happen to the site? Will Galmington be left with what will then appear to be an unsightly white elephant – and will the remaining sports field be lost because ‘development’ has occurred and the site can be considered brownfield?

If it will not be of benefit to local residents, the net effects may be negative, as it involves the reduction in playing field space and the loss of the present indoor bowls facility.

If the application is approved we request the following conditions be imposed:

1. That the external materials used for the building, and particularly those parts above the ground floor, be such as to minimise the visual impact both from College Way and the buildings to the north of the site, and from the scarp to the east. It is desirable that the building blends in with the predominantly green surroundings.
2. For similar reasons of reducing visual impact we ask that strict controls be imposed on signage, car park lighting etc.
3. If the field is to continue as a landing ground for air ambulances, that a clear access to the field be maintained at all times. We are concerned that parking may obstruct this.

10 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- it would be sensible to look at using local buses or extending routes – please do not

encourage further use of cars which encourages weight gain and causes pollution; increase traffic congestion at the junction of College Way and Pitts Close which will be detrimental in terms of highway safety on what is a major route for cars, cyclists, delivery vehicles, bus route and emergency route to the hospital from helicopter landing in the Civil Service playing fields together with access to local facilities; it will exacerbate parking on College Way; traffic survey flawed as its counts are taken after the school run and do not reflect real life traffic conditions; concern that the development should not cause the loss of the protected Poplar trees bordering College Way which provides one of the most attractive visual aspects of the area; no reference made to the bungalows in Pitts Close which will be impacted upon and the proposed centre would be visually obtrusive; inappropriate for a commercial use in a predominantly residential area; there are other established sport and fitness facilities within Taunton Deane – given existing economic downturn may provide unviable and concern regarding the re-use of any redundant industrial type building; another established sports facility has recently closed in Taunton; the site will not have adequate security; it will lead to people cutting through private land of adjacent flats; scheme should be referred back to the developer as the site next to the clubhouse (brownfield) is preferred and would not reduce the size of the sports field; the building is of an industrial type out of keeping with the residential location; it will cause noise and disturbance to residents; local residents not consulted or site notice posted; contrary to Local Plan Policy EN24 (Urban Open Space) and C3 (Recreational Open Space); current users of the outside sports facilities may be forced to pay higher commercial rates – reducing participation for those on low incomes; existing facilities have been underused due to lack of information; object to opening times; removal of screening which has previously been sited there for a reason; emergency helicopter service will suffer because of commercial demands to let the pitches at a much increased volumes, therefore reducing ‘landing slots’ and the waiting ambulances may be caught in the traffic chaos generated by the facility; no community involvement from the developer prior to submitting this major application; still no assurances about the plans for the existing Civil Service Sports Club site; concern regarding management of the site to ensure there is no trouble from young people in and around the vicinity of the site.

5 LETTERS OF SUPPORT have been received. Summary of comments:- despite the lack of information available on the website support the proposal; further enhancement to the Galmington Area; boost to the area – the sports facilities must be retained bearing in mind Comeytrowe/Trull has a large population; as a retired civil servant I have no objections (letter notes the representee lives 20 miles from Taunton).

POLICY CONTEXT

PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development

PPG17 – Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

RPG 10 – Regional Planning Guidance from the South West, TCS2 – Culture, Leisure and Sport, TRAN1 – Reducing the Need to Travel, TRAN10 – Walking, Cycling and Public Transport.

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policies STR1 – Sustainable Development, STR4 – Development in Towns, POLICY 21 – Town Centre Uses, POLICY 37 – Facilities for Sport and Recreation, POLICY 44 – Cycling, POLICY 48 – Access and Parking, POLICY 49 – Transport Requirements of New Development.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 – General Requirements, S2 – Design, EC12 – Major Retail and Other Key Town Centre Uses, M1 – Transport, Access and Circulation Requirements, M2 – Parking Provision, M3 – Accessibility, M5 - Cycling, C3 – Protected Recreational Open Space, C5 – Sports Facilities, EN6 – Protection of Trees , EN24 – Urban Open Space.

ASSESSMENT

The application seeks a new sports centre for the Civil Service Sports Club which will also be available to non-members, i.e. members of the local community. The proposed building is intended to be sited at the College Way end of the site, rather than replacing the existing clubhouse building, and includes provision of a new access of College Way, the local distributor road. The main considerations are the design of the building and visual impact in terms of the protected open space and the views from College Way, whether the proposal will result in the loss of playing field facilities, whether there are more appropriate sites in terms of the site itself and the sequential test and whether the access and visibility is acceptable.

Design and Impact upon protected open space

The proposed dimensions of the building are approximately 31m x 49m x 9m high. It is to be steel framed with a mix of brick and coloured cladding panels for the external walls. In design terms it is difficult to design a building that is both modern and attractive given the nature of the internal uses involved. The building is a large modern structure and attempts have been made to break up its visual appearance by the use of different external materials and a curved roof. It is considered that the building design is acceptable; however, the visual impact of such a large building in street scene terms remains a concern.

PPG17 states that the recreational quality of open spaces can be eroded by insensitive development or incremental loss of the site. In considering planning applications - either within or adjoining open space - local authorities should weigh any benefits being offered to the community against the loss of open space that will occur.

Para 10 of PPG 17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation 2002 states that local authorities should:

- 1 avoid any erosion of recreational function and maintain or enhance the character of open spaces;
2. ensure that open spaces do not suffer from increased overlooking, traffic flows or other encroachment;
3. protect and enhance those parts of the rights of way network that might benefit open space; and

4. consider the impact of any development on biodiversity and nature conservation.

The building is located within the urban open space designation covered by policy EN24. This states that new development will not be permitted unless the urban open space is surplus to needs or the development is compatible with the functions of the open space, would not impair the ability to provide these functions and is of an appropriate scale, siting and design to minimise the impact on the open space.

The open space is not considered surplus to needs and the existing function of the open space is as playing fields. The playing field provides an area for archery, two football pitches and two cricket pitches. This recreational open space is also protected under policy C3 of the Local Plan. In this policy proposals should not be permitted unless there is an excess of good quality recreational facilities that would be lost, sufficient to meet local demand; or the development provides a recreational or community benefit greater than the long term recreational value of the facility that would be lost; or equivalent provision in a convenient location is made. The issue therefore is one of whether the community benefit of the indoor and retained outdoor facilities is sufficient to outweigh the loss of the playing field uses such as the second cricket square. Clearly, there would appear to remain concern that the use of Queens College facilities as compensation for the loss of the second cricket pitch would not satisfy Sport England or leisure services. However, there further views are awaited.

The agent has provided the terms regarding an agreement with Queens College over joint use of the retained CSSC facilities and the use of the Queens College facilities, particularly for the cricketers in the future. The fundamentals of the agreement are as follows:

1. Agreement to the Queens College to lease the CSSC playing pitches with a priority of use in the order of CSSC, Queens College and wider general public in that order.
2. Agreement for the existing CSSC teams to continue to access the Queens College pitches including the cricket, with the order of priority being the Queens College, then CSSC.

The Council's leisure services department and Sport England raise concern that the proposal does not make it clear that there is a guarantee that displaced cricket teams for CSSC, for example, will have access to facilities at Queens on a Saturday afternoon (for instance) –merely suggesting a 'priority booking' situation that could in fact not solve the issue at all. The leisure department would expect a guarantee that those teams currently playing at CSSC and displaced as a result of the proposed developments have access to Queens College facilities at a level at least equal to that which they currently enjoy – for instance they forward their fixtures in April and these are guaranteed to be accommodated at Queens College without question.

The Council's leisure officer and Sport England have requested clarification from Queens College before responding further. Queens College have set out their response to the application and there support for the retention of the playing fields and other sports facilities where there remains demand for their use and is intent upon providing wider use of its own such facilities as far as is conducive with its

responsibility for child safety and protection. Queens College consider that should consent be granted it will assist Queen's College in realising its intent by providing changing facilities that can be used by visiting teams (quite separate from those provided for the school's pupils) in the CSSC Club House for which there is now an agreement, subject-to-contract and planning permission, for Queen's College to acquire. The agent acting on behalf of Queen's College's states that the College would not provide any other opportunity to provide such facility and, in fact, there is very little scope for much-needed extra classroom and examination accommodation so that its acquisition of this site and buildings immediately to the east of the Application Site would also provide such accommodation for its educational needs.

It would be the school's intention to operate the site as part of its overall school campus so that vehicular access would be largely through its main site rather than via Civil Service Lane, reducing traffic movements along that lane. However Queen's College would still need to retain that access to its main site and to the present CSSC car park which it has used informally in the past. The intention would not therefore be to stop up the existing access, which has implications for highway safety as referred to later.

With regards to the loss of the second cricket pitch which would be lost if this application is approved, Queen's College has now agreed terms with the applicant, subject to contract, to provide second call (after the school's own needs) for the use of its own sports facilities, which would be available to CSSC for evening matches and for a number of weekends through the summer during half-term and the long school holiday. This agreement, a lease for 25 years, would also provide for Queen's College maintaining the whole of CSSC's remaining sports field with a cricket pitch in summer and two winter sports pitches.

Subject to the change of use of the existing buildings on the CSSC Grounds to educational use as described above and the applicant entering the lease on the terms agreed, Queen's College supports this application. The agent to Queens College states the application should only be approved subject to the Applicant entering an agreement under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act to ensure these conditions are implemented.

It is considered, on the basis of Sport England and the Council's leisure officer, that the proposal will impair the ability to provide the same range of playing field facilities as existing as the building and car park will take up space and there will also be a loss one cricket square. The scale of the building cannot really be altered given the proposed scheme. However the siting of this building in terms of the open space is questionable. It is a large building that has been located on the western end of the site in a location that would be clearly visible by traffic travelling along College Way and will also be visible from the footpath running east-west along the northern boundary of the site. Siting the building and car park along the College Way frontage eats into the open appearance of the playing field from this main vantage point.

Moreover, the Council's landscape officer considers that the proposed building and car parking, being located adjacent to College Way, will have a detrimental impact on the character of the 'Urban Open Space' and even with landscape enhancement would be inappropriate for this location. The impact of the building upon the street

scene is one of the considerations that need to be weighed in the balance against the degree of community benefit arising from the development.

The existing clubhouse building would seem a potential alternative location as has been suggested by a number of the objectors. This site is read in conjunction with the residential development to the north and east and the school to the south east. However an alternative access to the site would need to be considered.

Sequential Test

The applicant has submitted a planning statement which looks at the sequential test necessary as the proposal is likely to be a major traffic generator and the site lies outside the central area. This is in line with both PPS6 and the requirements of the Local Plan policies C5 and EC10. The policy concern, raised during the previous application, is that the test undertaken has not looked at all town centre sites and when these are looked at there are sites available which could house a sports centre use. The applicant argues that they have a specific business model which looks to incorporate the existing playing field facilities into a scheme to ensure their retention and that disaggregation onto a smaller site to provide indoor facilities would ignore the requirements to provide for outdoor sports. Financial viability of quality outdoor sports it is claimed can only be provided by linking the facilities on the one site. Relocation of the entire facility would require 3 hectares which could not be found in a more sustainable location. The proposed site is adjacent to the existing local centre and benefits from good local transport links and is considered an acceptable alternative. It is a location that is well related to residential areas and does not have a similar facility nearby on this side of town other than at Castle School.

Highway Implications

The highway authority have expressed concern that whilst they have been informed the proposal would be a direct replacement for the existing facility, currently served from Trull Road there is no information submitted regarding the future use of the buildings. Information within the correspondence from the highway consultant and Somerset County suggest the use would cease and the building be demolished, but this is not referred to within main contents of the information. The proposal seeks to gain access from College Way, a distributor road. The Highway Authority has made it clear that there is a presumption against providing a private access from a distributor road unless there is clearly a benefit to highway safety, such as the benefit from stopping up the substandard access from Trull Road. However, without comprehensive information as to the ongoing/long term future use of the buildings a full assessment of the implications of the scheme is not possible.

It is noted that highway safety has been raised as one of the fundamental concerns to the proposal from local residents. In terms of the access and highway visibility requirements the highway authority are satisfied that the proposal is acceptable. The pedestrian/cycle route now proposed in response to previous requests from the highway authority has been incorporated into the scheme. However, the highway authority raises concern as to the potential conflict of users, again without further clarification over the future use of this land. On the basis of the information submitted the highway authority retain their objection to the scheme.

Conclusion

In summary the visual impact of the scheme on College Way and the protected open space, together with the loss of facilities, is considered to be contrary to policy C3 and EN24 and this impact would be worsened by tree loss necessary for the highway visibility opening up the site. The lack of an adequate access and insufficient information regarding the stopping up of the existing access are considered further reasons to refuse the scheme. The impact on the loss of playing facilities, as set against community benefit is a balanced one as is the sequential test issue and the comments of Sport England and the Council's leisure department on this are awaited.

One of the recurring considerations in the assessment of the application relates to the long term future of the CSSC buildings. There is now an understanding that Queens College are seeking to purchase the remainder of the CSSC site. However, the existing CSSC buildings are located outside of the application site and it is considered that a comprehensive application which covers the existing application site and the remainder of the CSSC buildings, parking etc, would be the most appropriate way of assessing the relative community benefits and those of the highway authority with regards to the development of the site as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the further views of Sport England and the Council's leisure department, permission be REFUSED for reasons of adverse impact on protected recreational open space contrary to Local Plan Policy C3 and EN24 and potential loss of trees contrary to policy EN6, proposed access is not adequate to serve the development and would be contrary to the standards for design and layout of streets as set out in the adopted 'Estate Roads in Somerset' and would be contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy 49, Insufficient information has been submitted regarding the use of the existing buildings within the site, to satisfy the Highway Authority that the existing substandard access to Trull Road can be stopped up, the vehicular traffic removed, and the pedestrian/cycle link provided so that it is safe to use contrary to Policy 49 Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and Taunton Deane Local Plan policy M5.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

CONTACT OFFICER: 01823 356586 MR A PICK

NOTES:

.