

52/2007/037

CSSC SPORTS & LEISURE

ERECTION OF SPORTS CENTRE WITH PARKING AND ACCESS AT CIVIL SERVICE SPORTS CLUB GROUND, COLLEGE WAY, TAUNTON AS AMPLIFIED AND AMENDED BY LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AND PLANS 391/01-03.

321546/123357

FULL

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to erect a new sports club with parking for 122 cars with access off College Way. This new facility intends to provide a comprehensive use of the site with both indoor and outdoor facilities. The intention is to retain two football pitches, a cricket square and archery area, while internally the facilities will include a beginners' swimming pool, a main pool, health and fitness studios, a gymnasium, sauna, crèche facility, bistro bar, sports bar, changing rooms and showers as well as separate changing facilities for the outdoor sport use. The new building is located off College Way at the western end of the existing site and the application site excludes the existing clubhouse, car park, bowls building and multi use games area.

The proposal includes a landscape assessment, an assessment of the need and a sequential test as well as a transport assessment. The transport assessment indicates the site is in an accessible and sustainable location and it is indicated the vehicular access from Trull Road would cease. A footway is to be provided along College Way and cycle parking facilities are proposed. The peak hour in the evening indicates an additional 69 two-way movements on College Way to the north of the site and an additional 54 two-way movements on Galmington Road to the east of College Road. It is stated the vehicular increase as a result of the development is unlikely to have a material impact on off-site junctions.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY I have the following observations on the highway aspects of this proposal. Through pre-application discussions with the developer, it was established that the proposed sports centre, the subject of this application, was to be a direct replacement for the existing facility, currently served from Trull Road. There is no mention within the application of the existing facility, and how this is related to the current application 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. It was suggested during pre-application discussions, that a balance needed to be struck. The permanent removal of traffic associated with this site, from the extremely substandard Trull Road access, may be sufficient benefit to the Highway Authority to allow an exception and therefore the provision of a single access for the development from College Way. This information has not been included as part of the application, and as such the Highway Authority has concerns

about the proposal, and would request that further information be provided to enable a full assessment of the implications of the scheme. In terms of detail, there are concerns from the highway authority perspective. Direct access for individual properties from a distributor road should not be permitted. This is specified in the adopted document, 'Estate Roads in Somerset – Design Guidance Notes'. Despite pre-application discussions, the proposal has come forward with two points of access from College Way. The proposed service access is located opposite the junction of Pitts Close, and immediately adjacent to a light controlled crossing. Given the proximity of these features the service access does not comply with the required junction spacing of 30 m min, crossing spacing of 20 m min, and as such is contrary to Policy 49 of the Structure Plan and advice contained within LTN 2/03. There is also no turning facility proposed, and vehicles would be forced to reverse in close proximity to the existing highway facilities to the detriment of highway safety. This element of the scheme should be removed, and a single point of access provided, or the proposal will receive a recommendation of refusal on highway safety grounds. The main proposed vehicular access is also substandard. The visibility splay required is 4.5 m x 90 m with no obstruction greater than 900 mm above road level. By plotting the required visibility on the drawing submitted 24620 (03) 001'F, the splay to the south necessitates the removal of approximately five trees, and to the north approximately three trees. It is unclear from this drawing, how many trees will be removed for the access itself. Whilst the visibility is annotated on the submitted drawing, it is only achievable if the trees are removed and the proposed security fence is set back from the position shown on the drawing. I am concerned however that this will further interfere with the existing trees, and this may prove a concern for the LPA. Perhaps it can be clarified if the submitted drawing is an OS extract with indicative trees, or an accurate survey. There do not appear to be any footways shown on the submitted plan, and these will need to be included, especially in light of the SCC analysis on the submitted TA, where measures should be explored to reduce travel to the site by car. It will be necessary to provide a full highway standard footway across the entire site frontage, to allow access to pedestrians approaching from the south. It will also be necessary to provide a drop crossing to the south of the access as it is unlikely that pedestrians will walk past the site on the opposite side of the carriageway, to cross College Way and access the site. In exploring the content of the TA, it would appear that the daily traffic to the site would be between 700 and 950 vehicle movements. In line with TD42/95, this would normally necessitate the provision of a right turn lane, to ensure the free-flow of traffic on College Way. This will necessitate the re-design of the point of access, and will undoubtedly involve the further loss of trees. If the above points can be addressed and resolved, there would be no objection to the proposal, subject to the provision of double yellow lines along College Way to safeguard the use of the access, and the provision of a cycle/footway link between Trull Road and College Way that to date has not been able to come forward as there is insufficient land available. This proposal clearly necessitates the improved facility, and I would expect to see it provided. This will however require it being constructed at least in part within the site. It will also be necessary for the developer to upgrade to existing crossing facility on Trull Road in line with the new cycle/footway facility. To summarise, as the application stands at this time it must receive a recommendation of refusal on highway grounds: (1) The use of the service access to the site, in connection with the development proposed would be likely to increase the conflict in traffic movements close to an existing junction and pedestrian crossing resulting in

additional hazard and inconvenience to all users of the highway. (2) The service access does not accommodate adequate turning facilities to enable a vehicle to enter and leave the highway in a forward gear, which is essential in the interests of highway safety. (3) 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 accesses do not conform to these agreed standards and are not, therefore, adequate to serve the development proposed. (4) 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, and the vehicular traffic removed. 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 and the pumping station has spare capacity provided there is no trade waste being generated. 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. 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. There are water mains in the vicinity available for connection.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER my concerns are the proposals will have a detrimental impact on the landscape character of the existing open space of the playing fields which run south to open agricultural land to Trull. The proposals are likely to damage existing tree roots and have a detrimental impact on their health and amenity value. There is no landscape impact assessment or proposed mitigation plan to overcome the above concerns. PLANNING POLICY the proposal is for the replacement of the existing Civil Service buildings (currently accessed via Trull Road) with a new purpose built building, with a gross external area of 3,072 sq m over two floors. As an established use the proposal is acceptable in principle, policy C5 of the Local Plan supporting the enhancement of sports facilities. However, the overriding issue in this instance is one of scale. Policy C5 requires that a sequential assessment is required for major leisure trip generators. The current facility has a floorspace of around 760 sq m. The proposal increases the floorspace by well over 300% and includes a 20 m indoor pool, beginners pool, sauna and spa, gym and associated facilities such as bars etc. A significant increase in car parking is also proposed. Scale of the proposal therefore constitutes a major travel generator, thus requiring a sequential assessment in line with both C5 and EC10 of the adopted Local Plan. This approach reflects government advice in PPS6 and PPG13 in particular. Government advice also requires consideration of 'disaggregation' of facilities (i.e. flexibility in scale and format of the proposal to enable elements of the development to be split between sites if necessary). Whilst a sequential assessment of site availability has been undertaken it appears to have focussed on the Local Plan allocation for leisure use at Ladymead (Wellsprings) and has made no assessment of town centre sites which are sequentially the most sustainable. The Terrence O'Rourke Urban Development Framework (2004) identifies over 40 hectares of underused land in Taunton town centre. This is reflected in allocations at Firepool, High Street, Coal Orchard and Tangier sites in the emerging Town Centre AAP, all of which make reference to their suitability for leisure use. All of these sites are phased to be available within the next 5 years, the time normally required to demonstrate

availability. Furthermore, all of these sites are also better served by public transport for a development proposal of this scale, a key element of the sequential consideration. As such, by virtue of the scale of the proposed development and the lack of a thorough sequential assessment, the application does not conform to policies C5 and EC10 of the adopted Local Plan and should not therefore be considered as complying with Local Plan and national policy. DRAINAGE OFFICER I note surface water is to discharge to the mains sewer according to the application form. However in the design and access statement reference is made regarding the inclusion of a sustainable drainage system (SuDS). Reference is also made to a separate sustainability report. Any surface water run off will be required to pass through a SuDS system and details should be forwarded for approval before any works commence on site. The developer is advised to contact the department at an early stage to discuss the design of any system chosen. LEISURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER it is regrettable that the application is for a large building on playing fields, as the proposed loss of playing fields should, in most cases be opposed. Whilst it is stressed through the application that the primary use of the site is by 'Members' it is obvious that every match involves an equal number of players who are not members of the Civil Service Sports Club (the away team). The loss of any such facilities must therefore be seen as a loss of community facilities. The facilities are also used by community sports teams on a regular basis throughout the week, primarily for cricket matches. Despite the references at points 2.6 and 3.2 to there being only 1 cricket square on the site there are in fact 2 such facilities. The proposed loss of a cricket square will displace at least one team and result in the loss of a sports facility. This is unacceptable. The drawings also show the layout of 2 football pitches and the safety margins would appear from the drawings to be inadequate. This could be addressed and if the application were to be allowed a condition could be placed on the applicant to ensure that the pitches were laid out to FA standards in terms of safety margins. There are a number of inaccuracies within the application, notably the frequent reference to Taunton 'not being over subscribed' with Health and Fitness facilities. A recent study showed that in fact the provision of such facilities in Taunton had exceeded saturation point. I anticipate that 'demand' for any new facilities would not necessarily be a planning concern there is no proven unmet demand for further Health & Fitness facilities in Taunton (even allowing for the recent closure of the Fitness First facility). The reference to TDBC reducing the provision of swimming facilities is inaccurate as it has always been accepted that whilst St James Street will in all probability be 'redeveloped' as part of the regeneration of the town it will not be before the provision of a new facility. This reference should be discounted for the purposes of determining this application. It is accepted that the site as it is may well be failing but it is misleading to consider the application in terms of any 'unmet demand' for health and fitness (or in fact swimming) facilities as the demand from the community simply does not exist in my experience. The reference to the facility being 'unique' in offering both indoor and outdoor high quality facilities forgets the existence of the Blackbrook Pavilion site, the Taunton School facilities and the Taunton Vale Sports Club site. A very minor point but the tabulated summary of other sports facilities is neither wholly accurate nor comprehensive. I accept that the current facilities are not of a standard that would attract new members but that ultimately is the choice of the CSSC. It is regrettable that the proposed site is on the playing fields rather than on the existing site and it is unacceptable that a cricket square is lost as a result of the application. Whilst not the subject of this application it appears inevitable that there will also be a future loss of both a Multi Use Games

Area and an Indoor Bowling Rink on the existing site. Steps should be taken at this stage to mitigate any future loss of sports facilities through the inclusion of a MUGA with the current application (or a contribution to off-site provision) – it is accepted that there are sufficient Bowling facilities of an acceptable standard with sufficient capacity elsewhere in Taunton to accommodate the players from the CSSC site. On balance, whilst recognising the proposed facilities will be of a standard far beyond what is currently provided on the site, I object to the application on the grounds that it will result in the loss of playing fields, a cricket square and ultimately to the loss of a floodlit Multi Use Games Area and Bowling facility.

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'. If we do not consider the exceptions apply we will oppose the development. Our policy relates to all or any part of a playing field in an adopted or draft deposit local plan. In relation to this application in order to be in a position to support we would need to be satisfied that Exception E5 of our policy is being met. 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 light of this we need a clear understanding of the pro's and con's of the proposed development from a sports point of view in order to judge whether Exception E5 is being met. In looking at the supporting information we require clarification or further information. It is noted that the CSSC has stated that the application site is no longer viable in its current format, and in the absence of an alternative proactive approach to improve the site's viability, the facility will close in 2008. In light of this we strongly support the current efforts that are being made to retain the sporting use of the site. The following are issues we require further information on. It is not clear whether existing sports facilities on site (e.g. indoor bowls, multi use games area) will remain following construction of the new facility. We understand that there are two cricket squares on site and the proposal will result in the loss of one of these. This issue is not addressed in the supporting statement. We would welcome further information as to whether spare capacity exists elsewhere to enable users of the cricket pitch being lost to be satisfactorily accommodated. Any information as to the extent to which the proposals address specific facility needs identified by the Borough Council would be helpful. On the basis of the information submitted we do not feel there is sufficient information to support proposals.

14 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- road busy with cars parked during the day and parking will lead to serious congestion; it is too close to the junction with Pitts Close; will increase pollution; it will exacerbate parking on College Way; with the speed of vehicles it is an accident waiting to happen; inappropriate for a commercial use in a predominantly residential area; it will encourage noise and vandalism in the new car park; a two storey building will spoil the open green aspect; it will cause loss of view and privacy and loss of value; and will set a precedent for future development and a private sports club would not be an amenity for the community and is inappropriate development; a sports centre on the proposed site is ill conceived and not in the best interest of the membership or local residents; 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 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; small roundabouts should be considered at the junctions.

86 LETTERS OF SUPPORT have been received raising the following:- a high quality health and fitness facility in a highly accessible location, retention of green field pitches on site, revitalisation of a failing facility and maintenance of ongoing sports use in relationship with Queens College; Trull Road access could still be used. Aspect of open playing fields would be retained; sports facility for local use better than selling land for property development; to be welcomed on this side of town; prefer to see building by existing clubhouse; it will enable the archery club to continue to use the site.

POLICY CONTEXT

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, EC10 – Accessibility of New Development, 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 , EN9 – Tree Planting, 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 servicing are appropriate.

The proposed building is approximately 31 m x 49 m x 9 m 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 is still a concern.

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 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 of a small 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 will 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. If there is a loss of poplar trees as indicated by the Highway Authority to give adequate access visibility this would further open up views of the site and the building. Attempts to limit the impact by additional landscape planting, particularly to the east is proposed. However, this would not significantly reduce the impact on College Way. 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.

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 scheme does not provide an equivalent provision elsewhere and there is not an excess of good quality playing fields. 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. The bowls building and the multi use games area lie outside the application site and their continued use needs to be confirmed by the applicant. The retention of these facilities could be made a condition of any permission should Members consider the development here acceptable. The further views of Sport England are awaited.

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 here 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. There is also a strong level of support for the scheme.

The Highway Authority have studied the submitted Transport Assessment and concluded that the new access would only be acceptable provided the permanent removal of traffic from the Trull Road access. The lack of information over the site area outlined in blue not within the application has raised concern. There are two access points onto College Way and the service access is considered unacceptable in terms of highway safety and refusal is recommended on that ground. The main access as proposed has insufficient visibility at present and to provide this would require the loss of trees on the road frontage. This is not considered to be acceptable in visual terms. The Highway Authority also require a footway across the site frontage, a right turn lane and a cycle footway link between Trull Road and College Way. This latter request reflects Structure Plan policy 44 and M5 of the Local Plan and will require use of part of the site which may impact on the playing field facilities. Whilst there are therefore a number of matters which still require clarification, the Highway Authority recommend refusal on the basis of the current submission due to the service access, the lack of adequate access to the site and the insufficient information to ensure the existing substandard access to Trull Road can be stopped up to vehicular traffic.

In summary the visual impact of the scheme on College Way and the protected open space is considered to be contrary to policy EN24 and this impact would be worsened by the tree loss necessary for the highway visibility. The lack of an adequate access and the cycleway required by the Highway Authority and the dangerous service access are considered further reasons to refuse the scheme. A condition to address the stopping up of the access to Trull Road is considered possible to address this concern. 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 on this are awaited.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the further views of Sport England, permission be REFUSED for reasons of adverse impact on protected recreational open space contrary to Local Plan policy EN24 and potential loss of trees contrary to policy EN6, service access prejudicial to road safety contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review policy 49, inadequate standard of access in terms of visibility and turning to serve the development proposed contrary to policy 49 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review and lack of cycleway link not in keeping

with policy 44 of the Somerset and 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.

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NOTES: