

24/2006/041

THE TACCHI-MORRIS TRUST

**CHANGE OF USE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND TO RECREATIONAL USE AT
LAND OFF WHITE STREET AND STOKE ROAD, NORTH CURRY.**

332451/125360

FULL

PROPOSAL

The site comprises agricultural land that lies outside of the settlement limits of North Curry and just to the south of the North Curry Conservation Area. The proposal is an outline application for the change of use of 4.24 hectares of agricultural land to provide recreation facilities including a cricket pitch, football pitch, and three tennis courts with associated changing and storage facilities, car parking and the provision of a new access off White Street. There are a group of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order on the boundary of the site with White Street and these would be effected and some removed in order to provide the proposed access.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY the proposed roads are not of an acceptable standard and will not provide a safe access for the proposal and I recommend the refusal of the application. COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGIST views awaited. WESSEX WATER the site is within a sewered area with foul and surface water sewers. There is a water main in the vicinity of the site. SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST comments awaited. SERC no statutory species have been recorded at this site but legally protected species have been found within a 1 km radius of the site including Badgers and their setts.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER subject to reinforcement planting and management of existing boundaries with some additional planting it should be possible to integrate the proposals into the surrounding landscape, to reduce any landscape impacts the tennis courts would be better located adjacent to the changing facilities; the roadside trees have high amenity value (although some are in a poor state of health) and are covered by a Tree preservation Order. The proposed access would result in the loss of some of these. CONSERVATION OFFICER the proposal will have a negative impact on the listed buildings. NATURE CONSERVATION AND SPECIES OFFICER views on wildlife survey awaited. FORWARD PLAN the proposed housing development would be contrary to Policy S7 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan. In line with national and regional policy this seeks to apply strict control to development in the countryside. There are exceptions to that strict control, which include housing in certain circumstances. Those circumstances include the provision of affordable housing on sites adjoining villages, where there is evidence of local need for such housing. The site of the proposal does adjoin a village and evidence of need has been submitted. However, the relevant Local Plan Policy, H11, states, in line with advice at Annex B of PPG3, that such sites should not include open market housing, which this proposal does. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy H11. The use

of land adjoining a settlement for playing fields is an acceptable use, and I would also consider the provision of an ancillary pavilion or changing rooms to be one of the legitimate exceptions allowed for by Policy S7. Given the small scale of the recreational facilities, which would appear to be designed to meet local needs, this element of the proposals would also comply with Policy C5 of the Local Plan. The issue in relation to the housing is thus one of assessing whether there are material planning considerations that justify the departure from policy. There would clearly be some benefits to the local community from the combined proposals, in the shape of affordable housing and recreational facilities. And evidence of community support for the proposals has been submitted. However, both might be deliverable on other sites without the enabling open market housing. There is also a wider concern in relation to the delivery of affordable housing if this proposal is permitted. This is that if landowners see that there is a prospect of securing some open market housing on rural affordable housing exception sites, it would become very unlikely in the future that any policy compliant affordable-only exception sites would come forward. The proposal would also adversely affect an important tree group on the site frontage, contrary to Policy EN8 of the Local Plan. LEISURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER The existing recreation field's Cricket pitch is about 100 m too small on two sides to allow the standard 65 m minimum boundary limits to be provided; in terms of the football pitches the current orientation is too small for an adult team but is acceptable for a youth club. The proposed sports facilities would appear to meet the relevant standards in terms of size; the football pitch should be drained and levelled and the sports turf research institute should be consulted prior to work starting on the site; the provision of the sports facilities should be conditioned to any housing permission that may be granted; the pavilion needs to meet appropriate standards laid down by the Football Foundation; access to the tennis courts must be via a hard surfaced path and the tennis courts laid out to Lawn Tennis association standards.

NORTH CURRY PARISH COUNCIL are named as applicants and they strongly support the proposal.

7 LETTERS OF OBJECTION have been received raising the following issues:- the application site is outside of the settlement limits of North Curry and adjacent to North Curry Conservation Area and should be ruled out by Taunton's own policies; the site is not within the main built up area of North Curry and the description that it is surrounded on 3 sides by development is misleading; the relationship of the site to the core of the village is that it is on its outskirts and although local residents could walk there its use as a sports field is likely to end up with significant vehicular traffic as well; the informal recreation area would be likely to cause a nuisance to nearby residents and would be better located adjacent to the changing facilities and the informal recreation area changed to nature and wildlife area with hedgerows and trees retained and planted in the area; any permanent lighting would cause light pollution and should be resisted; if any excess land were to be used for additional sports facilities than this would again increase the traffic, be unnecessary and expensive to upkeep and divorced from the existing facility; the adjacent barn conversion suffered flooding as a result of land drainage problems and would not wish to see these exacerbated by additional development of the area; the proposed access is ill thought out and impractical, it has limited visibility and would create a hazard; the road opposite 18 Longs field has a steep gradient with inadequate vision for emerging traffic; White Street is used by a considerable amount of traffic

including Farm vehicles (many of which already span the full width of the road) and lorries, pedestrians including children going to school; there are no pavements along this stretch of White Street, down to the junction with Stoke Road; the junction with Stoke Road is potentially dangerous especially with parked cars in the vicinity and an informal bus stop; the proposed access is opposite Longs Field and would result in the narrowing of the road, which is already only 16 ft across and virtually one way and this would be a problem to all road users including pedestrians, larger cars, lorries and farm vehicles, combines and the like; further narrowing of the road would mean that traffic would find it impassable without damaging hedges and walls; traffic from the houses and recreation facilities would be high at times and would present an increased hazard to other users of White Street; the proposed access is unsuitable and would be dangerous; illumination of the area has been staunchly resisted by North Curry, will this proposal set a precedent?

1 LETTER OF CONCERN has been received raising the following issues:- is there a need for additional facilities? who will organise and fund the facilities in perpetuity? how will the site access cope with the traffic flow and limited parking shown on the sketch scheme? visitor teams may arrive in coaches how will they access the site and where will they park?

5 LETTERS OF SUPPORT have been received raising the following issues:- the cricket club is in need of a new cricket pitch and has been required to play home matches away from home due to the restricted size of the current facilities it is club with massive local interest and with suitable facilities young children will be able to be coached and a junior team created, the proposed site is located outside the settlement boundaries of North Curry; it will result in much needed low cost housing along with some standard housing, effectively infilling albeit technically outside the village limits; increased health and safety restrictions have precluded the continuance of cricket on the existing cricket pitch; the increasing requirements for play equipment has encroached upon the football pitch and it was recognised that an additional site for the facilities would be required for adult use whilst the existing recreational site could focus on young people; as such a new strategy has been developed with a MUGA being constructed with the help of County Council; we have rigorously looked at various options and believe the White Street option to be the only realistic opportunity within a close distance to the village centre, this application also provides a permanent green buffer to the eastern edge of the village under the control of the parish council; will provide low cost housing; and a limited amount of open market housing technically outside of the limit.

POLICY CONTEXT

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy 8 - Outstanding Heritage Settlement, Policy 38 - Sport and Recreation in the Countryside, Policy 49 – Transport Requirements for New Developments.

Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies S1 - General requirements, S7 - Outside defined settlement limits, new building will not be permitted unless it maintains or enhances the environmental quality and landscape character of the area and: (A) is for the purposes of agriculture or forestry; (B) accords with a specific development plan policy or proposal; (C) is necessary to meet a requirement of environmental or other

legislation; or (D) supports the vitality and viability of the rural economy in a way which cannot be sited within the defined limits of a settlement. New structures or buildings permitted in accordance with this policy should be designed and sited to minimise landscape impact, be compatible with a rural location and meet the following criteria where practicable:- (E) avoid breaking the skyline; (F) make maximum use of existing screening; (G) relate well to existing buildings; and (H) use colours and materials which harmonise with the landscape. C5 - Sports Facilities, EN6 - Protection of Trees, Woodlands, Orchards and Hedgerows, EN8 - Trees in and Around Settlements, EN14- Conservation Areas, EN16 - Listed Buildings.

Taunton Local Plan villages with no allocations - NORTH CURRY:-

19.50 North Curry is one of the most attractive villages in Taunton Deane, being recognised as an Outstanding Heritage Settlement in the Structure Plan. It is relatively large, and consists of a tightly knit core, set around Queens Square, from which ribbons of development extend in 5 main directions. More recent development has consolidated this form. It has numerous listed buildings, particularly at its heart, and an extensive conservation area. Attractive open areas around St Peter and St Paul's church and south of The Manor House are areas to remain undeveloped. The village is set within a finger of North Curry Ridge Landscape Character Area, which extends north-eastwards into the Somerset Levels Landscape Character Area. There is a prominent scarp slope to the north of the village which is a proposed Special Landscape Feature called the North Curry Ridge, where policy EN11 will apply.

19.51 North Curry has a relatively wide range of services including a health centre, village hall, primary school, post office and two shops. However, it has a relatively low level of local employment. The bus link to Taunton is at a minimal level suitable for commuting and school attendance.

ASSESSMENT

The application is located outside of the settlement limits of North Curry where the Local Plan Policies S1 and C5 needs to be considered. Policy C5 allows new sports facilities outside of settlements provided there is a clear and demonstrable need for the facility. I am currently awaiting a statement of need, but from discussions with the Leisure and Recreation Officer, I understand that the existing recreation area does not have sufficient space for the proposed facilities. If a need is established then the principal of a recreation area in this location is acceptable. The recreation area will need a means of access and parking. The current proposal shows this to be a joint access via the new access and road proposed in connection with the residential development. The proposed site access, off White Street, does not conform to the requirements of the Highway Authority and is contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Policy 49 and Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy S1. The access and proposed visibility splays will have a detrimental impact on a roadside group of trees covered by a tree preservation order and are likely to result in the felling of some of those trees to the detriment of the visual amenity and character of the area contrary to Policies EN6 and EN8 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan. It is the opinion of the Conservation Officer that the loss of the trees would alter the rural character to the approach to the conservation area contrary to the requirements of Policy EN14. Whilst I accept a balance needs to be made between the advantages

of the additional sports facilities and the objections to the proposal I consider that, in this case the balance is clearly against the development and I consider that the proposal is not acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

Permission be REFUSED for the reasons that the proposed access would be contrary to Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review Policy 49 and Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy S1(A), the proposed access would result in the loss of trees considered to be of high amenity value adding to the local character of the area contrary to the requirements of Taunton Deane Local Plan Policies EN6 and EN8, the proposed access would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the North Curry Conservation Area contrary to the requirements of Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy EN14.

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

CONTACT OFFICER: 356467 MRS J MOORE

NOTES: