

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Notes of a Development Control Forum

Erection of Floodlights University Sports Athletics Track

12 December 2007

10.00am – 11.45pm

Application No: 07/0939/FUL
Site Address: University Sports Athletics Track, Wilberforce Road, Cambridge
Description: Erection of floodlights to serve Athletics track and existing and proposed hockey pitches
Applicant: University of Cambridge
Agent: University Estates Management and Building Services
Case Officer: Peter Carter
Lead Petitioner: Mary Griffin/Elizabeth Davies

Present:

For Applicant

Joan Lasenby – Applicant
John Clark – Applicant
Tony Lemons – Applicants Agent

For Petitioners

Elizabeth Davies
Sue Collins
Morcom Lunt
Mary Griffin
Neil Costello
Matthew Richardson

Members of Planning Committee

Councillors Blencowe, Dryden, Reid, Durrant, Dixon, Balir

Declarations of Interest by Members

Cllr Reid: Husband part time Consultant for University Estates Management
Cllr Baker: Member of University of Cambridge and Emmanuel College

Officers

Brian Human (Chair), Paul Johnson (Case Officer), John Blunt (Committee Manager), Glenn Burgess (Committee Manager)

Text of Petition

The text of the petitions was as follows:

- Objection to the proposal for the erection of floodlights to serve the athletics track and existing and proposed hockey pitches
- The existing facilities are used extensively by members of the local community in Cambridge and the provision of floodlights would increase the opportunity for that community, and local youngsters in particular, to benefit from the use of these facilities all year round

Case by Applicants

Mr Clark spoke to the application and made the following points:

1. Improved recreational facilities are needed for use by both the University and the local community during the winter months. With this application we also aimed to minimise the impact of the development on the local environment and residential amenity.
2. The site is actively used by both the University and between 60 and 70 local clubs and other organisations during the year.
3. It is an important community facility which is currently unavailable for use in the winter months due to the lack of floodlighting.
4. Although the site lies within Green belt, it is not open, undeveloped land but is an intensively used outdoor sport's facility set in a well-screened and landscaped setting.
5. There is a large two storey pavilion with security lighting, an access road and car park for 118 cars (both of which are lit at night), an athletics track with equipment cabinets and a throwing cage and an all weather hockey pitch enclosed by safety netting.
6. Permission has already been granted to construct a second artificial hockey surface and erect floodlights to the athletics track – which would provide a much higher level of lighting than is currently proposed.
7. The proposed application would be for floodlighting to the athletics track:
 - 12 columns (6 x 8m, 4 x 10m and 2 x 16m)
 - All columns have 3 lighting heads excepts the two 16m columns which have 4 lighting heads
 - Unlike the previously approved scheme, this level of lighting is sufficient for training purposes only and not for competition use.
8. The proposed application would also be for floodlighting to the hockey surfaces:
 - A greater level of lighting is required to ensure the health and safety of players
 - 14 columns at 15m each – 8 of which have 4 lighting heads, 4 have 2 lights and 2 have 7 lights.
 - The originally proposed height of all the columns was reduced following the public consultation exercise last year with the aim of reducing the visual impact of the development
 - Lighting heads are designed to minimise light spillage and are the most energy efficient available.
 - The lighting columns are not demountable.
 - Detailed restrictions regarding the limited times when the floodlighting may be used have been submitted with the application.
 - The University is more than willing to enter into a section 106 agreement that will ensure the continued community use of these facilities.
 - Diagrams were tabled regarding how the lighting system is designed to minimise the light spillage outside the track and playing surfaces.
 - The landscaping scheme implemented in 1994 has now matured and provides a very effective screen to the extent that from most of the public vantage points the proposed lighting columns will have no significant impact. The University would also willingly provide additional landscaping to the requirements of the City Council.
 - Whilst there will be some additional activity associated with the use of the facilities in the winter months – it is likely to be no greater than that currently experienced in the summer months.

- A full report has been commissioned from independent ecological consultants (RPS) to advise on the ecological impacts of the proposal and has concluded that there will be no impact as a result of the floodlighting. This is principally because of the limited overspill of light onto surrounding areas and the fact that the lights will not be operated past 9.30pm.

Mr Lemons spoke in support of the application:

9. There is a notable lack of sporting facilities in the whole of the UK – and particularly in this region. With the anticipated expansion for the area it is extremely important to have improved sporting facilities
10. Increased facilities will encourage youngsters, and all members of society, to have a more active and healthy lifestyle.
11. Cambridge University has built up effective partnership working with local sports clubs and the City Council – the indoor cricket school at Fenners is a good example of this.
12. Reports by Sports England and Cambridgeshire Horizons have highlighted the need for increased sporting facilities in the area. The Cambridge City Council Sports Services Strategy also states that partnerships should be built (particularly with the University) to increase the number of facilities available.
13. In order for the existing and proposed hockey pitches to be regarded as a centre of excellence there is a need for floodlighting – and if established would also be the only one in the area.
14. As the hockey season currently runs from late August until Easter the facility at Wilberforce Road is unusable for around 50% of that time. Also as this is the only athletic track in this sub area and cost around £4 - £5million it is unacceptable that it is unusable in the winter months.
15. A large number of letters have been received from local schools and sports associations in support of this application.

Joan Lasenby spoke in support of the application:

16. Currently President of the Cross Country Club and an active athlete currently taking her coaching qualifications but as a keen astronomer is also very sensitive to concerns regarding light pollution.
17. The C&C currently has a membership of nearly 600 – a number of which have reached international standard. To have no facilities for these members to train in the winter months is unacceptable. If members only train in the summer there is a risk of them not persisting in the sport and therefore not reaching their full potential.
18. Getting involved in sports and physical exercise results in good health (decrease in obesity and diabetes) and less social problems.
19. There is a need to nurture our sporting talent and improved facilities in order to stop people moving away from the area.

Case By Petitioners

Sue Collins presented the views of the petitioners against the application:

20. The local residents had previously supported the 2004 planning application for the installation of lighting at the facility.
21. We are supported in the opposition of the application by the following:
 - North Newham Residents Association
 - Clerk Maxwell Residents Association
 - Storey Way Residents Association
 - West Cambridge Preservation Society
 - Gough Way Development
 - Bulstrode Gardens
 - Hedgerley Close
 - Members of Cambridge University Astronomy society
 - Wildlife Trust
 - Cambridge Preservation Society
 - CPRE
22. The new proposals will damage the historic setting of this area and adversely affect residential amenities.
23. The proposals contravene national and local planning policies – Cambridge Local Plan, PPG2: National Green Belt Policy and PPG17: National Plan on Sport and Recreation.
24. PPG2 states – the purposes of Green Belt land “are paramount and should take precedence over land use objectives”
25. PPG 17 states – “In considering applications for floodlighting LA’s should ensure that local amenity is protected. Impact on the openness of Green Belt land, or on the character of the countryside, of floodlight towers, should be a key factor in determining whether permission is granted”
26. Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice states – “Sports floodlighting in foraging area (e.g for bats and moths) can be seriously detrimental”.
27. Questions to consider include:
 - Scale, intensity and impact of the proposals
 - Protection of the Green Belt land
 - Respect of Cambridge Local Plan
 - Longer Term Aspirations of Sporting Syndicate
 - Alternative strategies for meeting perceived sporting demand
 - Essential Information missing
28. We feel that the City Council needs more information on the following:
 - Suggested lighting
 - Ecological damage
 - Traffic Impact
 - Impact of consultation inadequacies and misleading information
 - Possible alternative schemes
29. Concerns include:
 - High intensity of the hockey field floodlights
 - Inability to demount and detach lighting in summer months
 - New proposals result in a lot more impact on the community and environment: 92 laminas instead of 54 at a total of 149KW
 - No traffic study has been completed

30. Light will be reflected upwards from the track and therefore be clearly visible causing problems to the observatory which is to the south of the site. This could also have an affect on youngsters getting involved in astronomy.
31. Lighting will affect wildlife such as bats and moths, which frequent the site.
32. Conclusions:
 - The proposals are overbearing for the site
 - The Green Belt land must be preserved
 - The details of the previous application would be acceptable

Morcom Lunt added that:

33. The visual scenery of the Green Belt land will be ruined by the facility.
34. If the hockey facilities become a centre of excellence there will be problems with accessibility and congestion for residents and users.
35. Does not believe that the University has gone as far as possible to resolve the situation.

Dr Neil Costello and Matthew Richardson presented the views of the petitioners in support of the application:

36. Athletics is one of only a few growth sports and makes a huge difference to a lot of lives.
37. C&C is the premier club in Cambridgeshire and is a member of England Athletics Regional Council. It leads nationally on coaching strategy and focuses on inclusiveness and community development.
38. The facilities at Wilberforce Road are a safe environment providing high quality technical facilities. Without floodlights the facility is substantially wasted.
39. Due to the lack of training facilities during winter months many members train on the park and ride site or on Jesus Green – which are both inappropriate and unsafe.
40. A lack of winter facilities results in members dropping out or having very limited participation.
41. Hockey is major sport in Cambridge and we currently play at a high level (EHL) – however progression past this without the all year round facilities is difficult.
42. Recent EHL games at Wilberforce Road have nearly been postponed due to the lack of lighting at the facility.
43. There are large numbers of hockey players in the region – Cambridge City, Cambridge Nomads, Cambridge South, Cambridge Ladies, Cambridge University and all the Cambridge Colleges and Schools.
44. A number of international hockey players live in Cambridge but due to the lack of facilities have to travel to other parts of the region to train.
45. Weekday availability is only 25% of potential for the hockey facilities – 2 hours per day between 1.30 – 3.30pm in season. At the moment the pitches can only be used for the university but lights would turn it into a community facility.
46. Quote from England Hockey Pitch FAQ – ‘Club training is an evening past time for the vast majority of players and coaches in England and lighting is therefore essential’.
47. There is a lot of demand for improved facilities from 5 local clubs, local schools and university clubs – with current facilities regularly fully booked.
48. 281 letters of support have received from university students and 100’s from local people.
49. It is important to maintain the long-term sustainability of Cambridge as a desirable place to live.
50. The scheme is the single biggest improvement that could be made to local sports facilities
51. This is a unique opportunity to dramatically improve facilities for local sportspeople. Light, and the second pitch, would transform Wilberforce Road into a top class hockey centre.

The Case Officer's comments:

52. 70 representations have been received opposing the application with Issues including:

- Increased noise pollution
- Affect on wildlife
- Impact on Green Belt
- Increased traffic and congestion
- Does not fit with Cambridge Local Plan

53. A number of representations have been received supporting the application including:

- Active Committee
- Sport England
- City Council Conservation Team

Members questions and comments

54. Can we have more detail on the permission already granted in relation to this application?

A: In October 2002 permission was granted for eight 16m high lighting towers with 54 lighting heads to light only the athletics track. The lights were to be demountable and had to be removed between 5th May and 5th October. The new application would be for lighting just the infield and limited lighting for the full track.

55. 415 of the Local Plan Policy has not been mentioned but would seem to be the most important – with a set checklist for issues around lighting.

A: This has been looked at along with many other policies

56. Are the lighting plans and diagrams being taken at face value or have they been investigated fully?

A: We do have some expertise in this area and the details are covered fully in the Technical Report. The landscaping of the area (10-15ft high) would also result in less light spillage and the proposed level actually falls in the lower end of suggested lighting for park sites. An Ecological Report has been commissioned and states that there is 'no ecological impact'

57. Why is it not possible to have demountable lights for this proposal?

A: This was included in the original application and a requirement of section 106 – however it was deemed unsafe and not 'common sense'. It would cost between £15 - £20,000 to remove the lights (equating to 2/3rds of the full cost to run the athletics track) and this cost would have to be passed onto the users

58. How is recreational use in conflict with Green belt land?

A: PPG2 states that recreation can be used in Green Belt land but it has to be 'appropriate'. It is on this point that the decision will be made

59. Are there any other hockey pitches locally with lighting?

A: There are 2 other pitches but they are heavily booked and are not of the standard required for top-level hockey. In my opinion a Centre of Excellence could only be provided on the Wilberforce Road Site

60. What is the height of the Pavilion on the site?

A: An estimate of around 16 metres – but details will be included in the full Report

61. Can we have clarification on the views of the Institute of Astronomy?

A: Two correspondence have been received by the University confirming that they are in full support of the Application. We have reached full agreement with them regarding the times floodlights will be used so it does not affect their activities.

Summing Up by the Applicant

62. When the original planning permission was granted the land was not Green Belt.

63. The community needs the full benefits and use of these facilities.

64. It is totally unacceptable that these facilities can only be used for 6 months of the year.

65. There are no plans for the site to be moved – it will either be fully used or not!

66. With diabetes and obesity featuring so high on all agendas it is hypocritical not to agree improvements to sporting facilities such as this.

Summing Up by the Petitioners – against the application

67. We appreciate the time given to us by the City Council.

68. 12m is the correct height of the Pavilion as we have had it surveyed.

69. We are simply arguing for the preservation of West Cambridge as a national treasure.

70. Policy and Guidance goes against the approval of this application.

71. International hockey guidance states that synthetic pitches should have a 4m gap around the edge – whilst at present it is only 2m. Is this going to be changed?

72. If this is to be a regional Centre of Excellence for hockey and many people will travel from across the region to visit it – how will transport be managed in this residential area?

73. It is noted that 10-20% of light hitting the ground is reflected back up into the sky.

74. The lighting system will use 180,000 watts

Summing Up by the Petitioners – in support of the application

75. The Cambridge sub area is growing but to continue to attract more people and business we need facilities such as this.

76. The area is not rural Green Belt it is on a busy footpath.

77. Lights are already in place at the tennis courts next to the site.

78. The social and economic benefits far outweigh the inconvenience of lighting.

79. We have received petitions in support – 25 from students, 25 from hockey players and 25 from local residents.