
APPLICATION NO.	P07/E1669
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	22.01.2008
PARISH	THAME
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr David Bretherton Mr Richard Walker
APPLICANT	Thame Football Partnership
SITE	Church Farm Kingsey Road Thame
PROPOSAL	Creation of a community football club comprising of a clubhouse, floodlit main pitch and all weather training pitch, seven additional pitches, car parking, new vehicular and pedestrian access with associated earthworks
AMENDMENTS	As amended by drawings accompanying letter from Agent dated 31 March 2008, amplified by noise report accompanying letter from applicant dated 4 April 2008 and amended by drawings accompanying letter from Agent dated 24 April 2008.
GRID REFERENCE	470837/206869
OFFICER	Mr M.Moore

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application has been referred to Planning Committee at the discretion of the Planning Manager in view of the extensive public representations which have been received.

2.0 THE SITE

2.1 The site, which is identified on the **attached** location plan, lies to the north-east of Thame and is bounded on the south by the Thame by-pass and on the west by the A418, which is the main road between Thame and Aylesbury. To the south east are the sewage works and a small coppice whilst to the north-east the land is more open sloping down to a tributary of the River Thame.

2.2 The site extends to some 8.42 hectares. Approximately half of the area is level and used for sports pitches. From approximately halfway across the site, the site slopes quite steeply down to the Aylesbury Road and stream.

2.3 Access to the site is presently taken from the Thame by-pass which then serves an area for 30 cars and 3 coaches. There are presently no permanent buildings on the site although there is a large storage container for posts, nets etc in connection with the use of the sports field.

3.0 THE APPLICATION

3.1 As amended, the application proposes the construction of two full size football pitches, two smaller pitches, four junior football pitches and an all-weather pitch. A total of 154 parking spaces and 4 coach spaces together with 8 disabled parking spaces and cycle parking are proposed. The principal football pitch will be floodlit using six 15 m high masts each carrying the 3 floodlights. The proposed all-weather pitch will be floodlit with four 10 m high masts each containing one floodlight. A single building is

proposed with a footprint of some 50 m x 19 m and a roof overhang of a further 5 m. This accommodates a clubhouse with bar, function rooms and kitchens amounting to 252 sq.m. This area has then four separate changing rooms and showers and gives access to a 180 seater stadium overlooking the main pitch. A further area is proposed within the building for the use by the community football club comprising a further 4 changing rooms, disabled changing, additional toilets etc. Storerooms are also proposed attached to this building. In total it amounts to some 777 sq.m. of accommodation.

- 3.2 The principal football pitch will be surrounded by a 2 m high close boarded fence and a 5 m high chain link fence. This is to comply with Football Association regulations and would allow Thame United Football Club to play there. The all-weather pitch, which is 46 metres by 27 metres, would be surrounded by a 3 m high fence.
- 3.3 The existing access would be improved and would be the sole vehicular access to the site.
- 3.4 To the east of the site, adjoining the stream, there would be a large area left over which would include a surface water attenuation pond. An indicative landscaping plan has been submitted together with a variety of levels. These plans indicate that the existing pitches would have their levels raised by approximately 0.5 metre using soil which will have been dug out as part of what are extensive engineering works for the construction of the two main pitches on the site. These will be dug into the slope up to the proposed clubhouse. Attached to the clubhouse is the stadium which is not as high as it might have been if the land had been level, as the stadium uses the slope of the land.

4.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1 As originally submitted, the application also proposed a substantial marquee to be attached semi permanently to the principal building on the site. Because of concerns about landscape impact and noise suppression, the marquee has been deleted from the scheme. Other amendments have been submitted which give further details about land level changes. Although full consultation has taken place on each amendment, the number of representations both for and against the proposal have almost inevitably diminished as each amendment is submitted. Officers do not consider that the diminishing support and objections necessarily indicates a diminution in strength of the original representations made.

Thame Town Council	- Unanimous support. It should be noted that the Thame Town Council do own a portion of the site to which the application relates.
Neighbours (116 representations in respect of the original, support the application)	- They consider that the facility will encourage community spirit, there is a considerable need for such a facility, it will give children, both boys and girls, from 7 upwards a focus, it helps children with life skills, will reduce obesity and such a community use will be a considerable benefit to the town. Thirty-three letters of support were received in response to the first amendment and 20 in respect of the second amendment.

- (3) comments
- (18 objection)
- OCC County Highways
- OCC Rights of Way Officer
- Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee
- Football Association
- Sport England
- Environment Agency
- Concerns have been expressed that there must be high levels of planting and that access would be better taken onto the Aylesbury Road.
 - Concerns have been expressed about the access, noise, the intrusive lighting and litter. It could compromise the use of the existing skate park together with other uses that currently take place on what is regarded as a park. In addition, a letter has been received from the Lea Park Residents Association giving details of a survey they undertook on Lea Park. A copy of this letter is **attached**. In addition, a further letter with 17 signatories have submitted for each amendment objecting to the scheme. This letter points out that the signatories live within a radius of 150 m from the proposed clubhouse and floodlights. They consider that the position of the clubhouse is to the detriment of local residents and feel that the position is totally wrong. Despite what is claimed to be several public consultations, they consider that the reason that no objections were received in the early stages was because of confusion over the naming of the site location. The facts that development is accessed from the distributor road or by-pass means that that should have been given as the address. They go onto express concerns about disturbance caused by people leaving functions late at night, lighting will be intrusive, car parking seems to be totally inadequate, litter will be generated and finally the access is considered to be dangerous.
 - No objection. Requires conditions.
 - No objection but stresses that the footpath which crosses the north-east of the site must not be blocked.
 - Objection. They express concern over the floodlighting, the 5 m high fence, they consider that the access and parking is not safe and that the clubhouse is not in keeping with the area.
 - Support.
 - Support.
 - No objection (requires conditions).

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| CPRE | - | No objection although they suggest further footpath link could be created. |
| SODC Landscape Consultant | - | Objection. A copy of his most recent comments is <u>attached</u> . |
| SODC Environmental Health | - | Comments have been made concerning noise, contamination and lighting. They consider that their concerns can be covered by the imposition of appropriate conditions. |
| SODC Sports Development Officer | - | Support. She considers that the development will greatly enhance sporting opportunities in Thame. |
| SODC Countryside Officer | - | No objection. Requires condition to enhance biodiversity. |

5.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 5.1 Under reference P98/N0724, planning permission was granted in April 1999 for some 4.2 hectares (approximately ½ the present site) to provide 3 pitches, a car park for 30 cars and 3 coaches but with no other facilities on the top part of the site which is the southern part. Access was proposed to be taken via the existing access.

6.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING GUIDANCE**

6.1 South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies:

- G2 - Protect district from adverse development
- G4 - Protection of Countryside
- C1 - Development would have adverse impact on landscape character
- C4 - Landscape setting of settlements
- C5 - Loss of greenfield/agricultural land
- C6 - Maintain & enhance biodiversity
- EP1 - Adverse affect on people and environment
- EP2 - Adverse affect by noise or vibration
- EP3 - Adverse affect by external lighting
- EP6 - Sustainable drainage
- EP8 - Contaminated land
- D1 - Principles of good design
- D7 - Access for all
- D8 - Energy conservation
- R1 - Outdoor sport or play areas
- R4 - Outdoor sport facilities in the countryside
- R8 - Protection of existing public right of way
- T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users
- CF2 - Provision of additional community facilities

Government Guidance

PPG17 Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation

7.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 The principal planning considerations are:

- i) Whether the principle of the development is acceptable particularly having regard to PPG17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation).
- ii) The impact on the local landscape.
- iii) The impact of the proposed floodlighting.
- iv) The Impact on the amenities of neighbours.
- v) Energy conservation, water management and ecology.
- vi) Highway safety.

i) Principle

7.2 PPG17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation), was published in July 2002. It required Local Planning Authorities to undertake a survey of existing sports provision and to therefore identify any shortfalls in sports and recreation. The Council's draft consultation document was published in April 2008. Although it is still under active consultation, it is considered that it is a relevant consideration to this application. It identifies a shortfall in sport and recreation provision in the Thame area.

7.3 Policy R1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan generally supports new and improved facilities for outdoor sport. Such facilities have to serve local needs and the identified shortfall in Thame becomes more relevant. The policy recognises that new facilities should be well related to the settlements they serve and consequently if it is not possible for them to be provided within the settlement they should be 'adjacent'. In this case, the site is considered to be well related to Thame being sited adjacent to Thame in a location where there are already 3 sports pitches. The policy does however recognise, that the impact on the landscape setting of settlements is an important consideration and this is considered below.

ii) Impact on landscape

7.4 This development will have a major impact on the local landscape. Although there are already 3 pitches on the site, the lack of buildings associated with them and the fact that they were provided on land which is almost level, means that their impact is very limited. Across the site, there is a substantial drop from a point approximately halfway across the site which means that extensive earthworks will be required. From the top (level part) of the site, is a drop of 5 m, whilst towards the stream, the change in level is currently something over 6 m. The changes in levels will be accommodated through the use of banking at the edges of the various pitches. As can be seen from the representations, the Council's Landscape Consultant has objected to the development because of the impact on the landscape. This clearly has to be balanced against the existing identified shortfall in pitch provision and the 'public interest' in having a community football club and associated facilities. Once completed, the area will be grassed for the pitches, with only the all-weather pitch and car parking being hard surfaced. Given that the all-weather pitch and car park are at the highest part of the site, these hard surfaces would only be visible to users of the site.

7.5 The main pitch and the stadium are considered to be the main impact on the landscape. The stadium, changing facilities etc are all contained within one building which is in the middle of the site. It has been kept as low as possible by utilising the change in land levels and it would have a functional appearance. Given that it is serving the surrounding sport uses, it is considered that the impact of the building has been minimised.

7.6 Football league rules and highway safety require the fencing around the principal pitch, which will be located on the lowest part of the site but immediately adjoining the Aylesbury Road and the roundabout with the Thame by-pass. Being located on the lowest part of the site, the visual impact of the fence and floodlights will, to some extent, be reduced. There is some existing off-site planting on the highway verge. At this time of the year, with the trees, shrubs and bushes in full leaf, the screening effect is reasonable. However, these plants are off-site and as such their retention cannot be conditioned. In addition, during the winter months, the screening would be much less effective. A landscape strategy has been submitted with the application and the applicant has confirmed that any areas not required for pitches or runoff areas, can be planted with appropriate native species.

iii) Floodlighting

7.7 The principal pitch has 6 x 15 m high masts each carrying 3 floodlights. The proposed all-weather surface has four 10 m high masts each containing 1 floodlight. In the area of the application site, the by-pass and roundabout already has 10 m high street lighting columns. Sports pitches do require a far higher intensity of light than street lighting. Policy EP3 of the Local Plan sets out the issues that need to be considered. The applicant has indicated that the principal pitch floodlights would be used 2 evenings a week with the floodlights on the majority of occasions being switched off by 10 pm. If games go to extra time/penalties then these will generally be completed by 10.45 pm. In addition, Saturday games with a kick off time of 3 pm would require the lights to be switched on but they would be switched off by 5 pm. The all-weather pitch, would be available from 8 am to 10 pm Monday to Thursday and from 8 am in the morning till 8 pm on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The applicant has indicated that they would not object if the use of the all-weather pitch floodlights was conditioned accordingly. The impact of the floodlights on the amenities of neighbours is considered in the next section. In terms of the impact on the countryside, modern floodlights have improved substantially over the last few years. They can be highly focused on the playing surface with little direct light spillage beyond. However the light source will be bright in order to allow sport to be played, and is likely to give rise to spillage beyond and sky glow. The all-weather pitch, which would receive most usage, is away from the site boundaries. The principal pitch however, is relatively close to the existing roads but this is where the street lighting is also at its brightest. In addition, because the site adjoins the built up area of Thame, the impact of the new lights will not be significant. Without the floodlighting, it is likely that the project could not go ahead. The applicant has produced lighting schemes which demonstrate no direct light spillage beyond the playing surfaces. However, as indicated the floodlights will still be a feature in the local landscape after dark.

iv) Impact on neighbours

7.8 The nearest properties on the Lea Park estate are in Edge Hill and Fleetwood Way and the nearest property is some 46 m from the site boundary across the service road and the Thame by-pass. The main building and the lights are considered to be the principal impact and the nearest property to the stadium is just over 100 m away. With the intervening planting and distance, officers consider that there will be limited direct impact on the residential amenity of occupiers of those properties.

7.9 During matches there will be some noise from both participants and supporters. Due regard must be had however, to the fact that it is already a sports pitch. It will, of course, be used more intensively but, the distance and planting would be sufficient to help to reduce the impact. The stadium building includes a function area which the business plan advises will be used for functions. The building now proposed for such functions will be a permanent solid structure. A noise impact assessment has been

submitted and the Environmental Health Officer has advised that, subject to the building being built in accordance with the specifications set out in the noise impact assessment, there would be limited impact through noise during functions. Once functions finish, people would leave by car and taxi. This will lead to some increase in noise levels but again, officers consider that the distance involved would be sufficient to attenuate the noise disturbance.

- 7.10 The floodlighting will be visible from residential properties. It will however be visible as a light source rather than as direct light. Given that the lights are approaching 100 m away, it is considered that this would be insufficient to justify a refusal of planning permission.
- 7.11 There is also property on the A418 Aylesbury Road. The closest part of their curtilage to any pitch proposed is in excess of 70 metres. That nearest pitch has no floodlights. The distance to the principal football pitch is in excess of 200 m and to the clubhouse building a further 40 m. Again, these distances are considered sufficient to attenuate any disturbance.

v) Energy conservation, water management and ecology.

- 7.12 The applicant has confirmed in their application that the club house will be designed to achieve a level of energy efficiency above the requirements of the Building Regulations by using high efficiency boilers and high levels of thermal insulation. These measures should be conditioned on any planning permission. At present, the agent is still considering the issue and I will report further, as necessary, at Planning Committee.
- 7.13 Surface water will be designed to be sustainable through the use of balancing ponds at the lowest part of the site. This will permit on site surface water attenuation. Officers consider this to be acceptable and can be secured by condition. The Council's Countryside Officer has advised that such measures would permit the creation and enhancement of wildlife habitats. Officers consider that this can be achieved through the imposition of conditions to secure compliance with Policy C6 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

vi) Highway safety

- 7.14 The site is well served by the local road network and an access exists serving a car park for the use of half the application site for pitches. However, the current proposal will involve a higher usage. The County Surveyor has indicated that they have no objection provided the access improvements are undertaken and that the direction of the floodlights are properly undertaken to avoid night glare for drivers.
- 7.15 Officers consider that the parking area proposed (with 180 spaces plus coach and disabled spaces) is adequate for the development proposed. It has been suggested that car boot sales could generate large amount of traffic. Such use has not been suggested but could be covered by condition.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is acknowledged that this development would result in a substantial change to the local landscape. This has to be balanced against the benefits that a community football club would bring. With appropriate conditions, officers consider that the effects can be mitigated sufficient to justify a grant of planning permission.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is recommended that planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Commencing date 3 years**
- 2. Samples of all materials (all)**
- 3. Noise control, main stadium, public address and club house**
- 4. Noise control for public address system**
- 5. Noise rating for club house**
- 6. Scheme for floodlights to be agreed**
- 7. External lighting general**
- 8. External lighting specific**
- 9. Lighting hours of operation**
- 10. Contamination (investigation)**
- 11. Contamination (remediation and validation)**
- 12. Staged programme of archaeological work**
- 13. Surface water drainage scheme**
- 14. Foul drainage scheme**
- 15. Drainage design**
- 16. Habitat management plan**
- 17. Landscaping scheme with 5 year replacement**
- 18. Level survey to be submitted and agreed**
- 19. Construct access prior to first use**
- 20. Protect vision splays to 0.6 m above the carriageway**
- 21. Provide parking in accordance with Plan 30576 P105 Rev D**
- 22. Provide cycle parking**
- 23. Control light source**
- 24. Use for purposes specified in the application only**

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