

- 1.3 A 40 space car park exists which is served from Tile Barn Close which itself leads off Valley Road. Between the car park and the existing sports grounds is a small belt of trees.
- 1.4 As part of the sports grounds there are 4 hard surfaced tennis courts located on a shelf a little above the valley bottom. They are currently in use. They are served by a small timber pavilion but otherwise there are no buildings currently at the site to serve the sports ground.
- 2.0 **PROPOSAL**
- 2.1 The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a new sports hall with a total internal floor space of 2106 sq m. The building would be 50 m by 35 m with a maximum height of 9.7m. Some of the building comprises a lower section whilst the principal hall is the full height. There is a slight pitch to the roof resulting in the main eaves height being 8.5 m.
- 2.2 The lower part of the walls are proposed to be a smooth blue brick with a band of cedar cladding above the ground floor windows with profiled metal cladding above. The roof is proposed to be profiled metal cladding with metal external door and window frames.
- 2.3 The facility comprises a four badminton court sports hall (37 m by 21 m) to the full height of the structure, with a dance studio, fitness suite and four principal changing rooms within the lower section of the building. In addition, there would be store rooms, toilets and smaller changing rooms. On the first floor there would be 3 class rooms and an Information Technology suite. Copies of the plans are **attached** to this report.
- 2.4 Access would be taken to the north of the existing tree belt which separates the site from the car park. It would be hard surfaced to allow access to 3 parking spaces for the disabled adjacent to the building together with a 10 bike cycle stand.
- 2.5 The application was accompanied by a design and access statement which included a tree report, visual impact assessment and reports on transport, sustainability and ecology. It draws attention to a public consultation exercise undertaken during 2010. The existing sports hall, located within the main campus, is over 40 years old (see planning history) and has structural issues. At present it has an uneven floor and leaks in the roof and is not capable of beneficial use. From 2009 onwards it has not been used for sport. A subsequent structural report has been submitted which shows that a considerable sum of money would have to be spent on the foundations and roof to permit it to be used for sport again. The statement advises that the option of rebuilding on the existing site has been considered but is not feasible because of the construction phase which would be difficult and the sports hall would continue to be remote from the sports pitches, which makes dual use of the changing rooms difficult.
- 2.6 During the processing of the application there have been considerable discussions with OCC (Highways). A revised travel plan has been submitted which seeks to demonstrate that there will be no increase in parking as a result of the proposals. It does not, however, address issues of cycle parking.

3.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 The applicant recently submitted additional information which was seeking to clarify/amend their existing Travel Plan. Immediate neighbours and OCC (Highways) have been consulted. I will report any further neighbour comments at the meeting. In respect of the application the following consultation responses have been received:

<u>Henley Town Council:</u>	Object to the scheme. They consider it is un-neighbourly, out of keeping on the edge of the AONB, un-sympathetic to its surroundings, lacks parking and turning spaces and too close to residential properties.
<u>SODC (Environmental Protection):</u>	No objection
<u>SODC (Sports development officer):</u>	support provided Sport England have no objection to loss of existing facilities.
<u>Monson (drainage consultant):</u>	No objection, requires drainage conditions.
<u>SODC (landscape consultant):</u>	Concludes that the building would impact detrimentally on the landscape character of the site and its AONB context.
<u>OCC (footpaths):</u>	No objection.
<u>OCC (Highways):</u>	There have been extensive discussions both pre and post submission. The recently submitted travel plan has been considered and an objection to the scheme is maintained on the basis of a lack of a full up dated Travel Plan to encourage sustainable travel which raises concerns over highway safety and the absence of cycle parking to standard.
<u>Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor:</u>	No objection but requires conditions relating to methods of construction and provision of CCTV.
<u>Sport England:</u>	No objection to loss of tennis courts and part of a grass pitch provided the floor of the sports hall is provided to a proper standard to allow for sport in the hall.
<u>Henley Society:</u>	Objection. They consider that it is a large and unattractive building, would be next to a proposed memorial woodland, result in noise and traffic and increase litter and anti social behaviour to the area.
<u>Neighbours:</u>	(35) objection. All the objections are from local residents. They consider that

- The design is industrial,
- The development would be on one of the last green spaces in Henley,
- The development would be detrimental to the AONB,
- The building is likely to be used for examinations in the summer months leading to a large increase in students in the area,
- There would be an impact on wildlife,
- The roofing system comes from the USA so the building is not sustainable,
- There would be overlooking of adjoining residential property,
- A case not made for the new facility,
- The development would result in the loss of two tennis courts,
- There would be excessive light pollution,
- The college could use Gillotts sports centre which has only recently been refurbished,
- There could be problems about security when not the building is not in use,
- Increased use will increase litter in the area which is already a problem.

Support: (10) letters have been received from local sports groups and others who would benefit from the facility. They consider the development

- Is crucial for the development of sport in the area,
- The site is ideally situated next to existing pitches and courts,
- There are links with Henley Hawks, Reading Rockets, Netball and basketball clubs which means that the development would benefit sport in the Henley area generally.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 In 1966 (P66/H0286) planning permission was granted for numerous alterations and new buildings on the main campus. It included the provision of an indoor sports hall within the principal part of the campus which included a main hall similar in size to that now proposed, together with changing rooms and small ancillary areas. At that time, the current site was already in use for outdoor sport.

4.2 In 1992 (P92/S0573/OCC) Oxfordshire County Council granted planning permission for the construction of a vehicular access to the playing fields together with the construction of a car park for staff and students of the main college.

4.3 In 1993 (P93/S0264/O) Oxfordshire County Council granted outline planning permission for the construction of a sports hall and ancillary works at the site. Although submitted in outline, siting and access were determined. At that time the Tile Barn flatted development was constructed. From the siting plans, the building approved was 43m by 22.5m. Indicative plans showed a building with a curved roof building with an overall height of 10.4m. At that time the plan indicated a similar sized main hall as now proposed together with ancillary changing rooms and teaching areas. This permission was renewed in 1996 (P96/S0351/O/R), 1999 (P99/S0493/O/R) and 2001 (P01/S0037/O/R). No reserved matters applications were submitted and the last permission lapsed in March 2004.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 The following are considered of most relevance in the consideration of the application: Planning Policy Statements PPS1, PPS7, PPG13 and PPG17.

South Oxfordshire Local Plan Policies: G1, G2, G3, G4, G6, C1, C2, C4, C9, EP2, EP3, EP6, D1, D2, D6, D7, D8, R1, R3, R4, R8, CF2, T1, T2 and T3.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main issues in this case are:

- The need for the development
- The loss of tennis courts and sports pitches
- The impact on character of the area and the adjacent AONB
- The direct impact on neighbours
- The impact on the local road network and the adequacy of parking
- Other issues

The need for the development

6.2 The applicant advises that sport is an important part of the curriculum at Henley College. Of the 500 students at the college who actively participate in sport, 400 are pursuing some form of nationally accredited qualifications (eg BTEC Diploma in Sport). This has proved increasingly difficult since the structural problems have occurred in the existing sports hall. The college has to use off campus sports facilities which do not represent an efficient use of resources.

6.3 PPG17 advises that

'open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others'

6.4 Active participation in sport is recognized as an important part of education and it is therefore in the public interest to permit such facilities, subject to other planning considerations.

6.5 The existing sports hall is incapable of use at present. The floor is unsafe to play sport on as there are cracks in it, with parts raised above other parts. The roof leaks and clearly requires much work to make it safe. A structural engineer's report has confirmed that considerable expenditure would be required to permit its beneficial use. Notwithstanding significant investment, it would remain a 40 year old building with shortcomings in present standards for such a facility. The changing rooms are still capable of being used.

6.6 One option would be to demolish the building and erect a new one on the same site. The applicant has suggested that such an option would be difficult as the building lies in the middle of the campus and there would be practical difficulties in demolition and building in a manner which would be safe and not disruptive to other activities on the site. In addition, it would mean that the existing sports pitches would be left without changing rooms. In my opinion, this option has not been fully explored. Such practical difficulties of construction would occur in connection with any redevelopment of the existing buildings at the campus. The sports pitches are only some 250 m from the changing rooms which I do not consider to be a deterrent to users of the sports pitches. The possibility of a changing facility for the tennis club does not appear to have been examined.

The loss of tennis courts and pitches

6.7 Both PPG17 and local plan policies (in particular CF1) seek to protect existing sports facilities. In this case the development is proposed on two tennis courts. However, these two courts have clearly not been in use for some time and very close by are 4 tennis courts in use and in good condition. The development will also involve the loss

of a small part of a football ground. However, there is adequate space to move all the other pitches. As such the proposal does not involve the loss of any pitch. The provision of a sports hall would still permit the use of the land for sport provided the main hall was built to an appropriate standard in accordance with Sport England's advice, which could be covered by condition. I do not consider that the loss of the two unused tennis courts and part of a football pitch would be an overriding consideration in this case.

The impact on character of area and the adjacent AONB

- 6.8 PPS 7, Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, confirms that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have the 'highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty'. Major development should not take place in such areas except in exceptional circumstances. The PPS further advises that such applications should be assessed against the following:
- (i) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
 - (ii) the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
 - (iii) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*
- 6.9 Although the site is not actually in the Chilterns AONB, its proximity and inter visibility makes it inevitable that any development of the site will have an impact on the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside.
- 6.10 There can be no dispute that there will be a diminution in the visual quality of the AONB and that this development will have a negative impact. As a result of their function, sports halls tend to be large boxy buildings which are of a significantly larger scale than residential properties. The existing college buildings are of a comparable scale but there is little inter visibility because of the topography and woodland. There is some existing tree screening between the existing car park and existing residential properties are some distance away from the proposed hall. The properties to the west of Tile Barn Close are three storey blocks which are of a similar height to the sports hall. However the hall would extend the built form into the countryside. When walking down the valley on the public footpath, the hall would be seen against a backdrop of the rising ground of the Valley Road development. When approaching the site from Tile Barn Close, the hall will be viewed against a backdrop of the wooded side of the valley through a foreground of trees. I consider that the proposal would look out of place in the context of the location detracting from the rural character and appearance of the local landscape.
- 6.11 In the absence of any special circumstances, I would have no hesitation in recommending a refusal of planning permission. However, youth education and health and fitness are also important planning considerations which need to be weighed against the visual impact. At this stage I am not convinced that alternative provision of the facilities such as an enlarged sports hall within the main campus, have been adequately explored.

The direct impact on neighbours

- 6.12 The residents of a number of properties in Tile Barn Close will see the building. The nearest is in excess of 50m away and I do not consider that there would be any overlooking or overshadowing from the building. Although a large building, I do not

consider that it would be so close to any property as to represent an overbearing form of development. The use of the building itself would not result in any excessive noise or disturbance as the activities would be contained within the building. Any increase in the use of the pitches is likely to be minimal as they are grass pitches. Many of the representations received relate to parking issues which are considered separately below.

- 6.13 The applicant has confirmed that it is not the intention to permit general public usage of the sports hall. The PPG17 study of recreation facilities has identified a shortfall of provision in Henley. However, it is not the intention of the applicant that this proposal would necessarily meet that need. The majority of the usage would be by the college itself in connection with its educational function together with some ancillary use by outside sports organisations. The college have advised that it would not be used in the manner of a social club as there is no bar or catering area proposed. They have suggested that use by parties other than the college, who would use it from 8:30 till 17:00, could be controlled through the imposition of an appropriate condition. In the evenings, it is proposed that any use will have ceased by 21:30 and that any usage between 17:00 and 21:30 would be for nominated clubs only rather than the general public. They indicate such clubs would include the Henley Tennis Club, who use the adjacent courts, Upper Thames Rowing Club and Henley Rugby Club for training.

The impact on the local road network and the adequacy of parking

- 6.14 At present, during the day in term time, there are considerable numbers of cars parked on street in Tile Barn Close, Deanfield Road and Valley Road. I have no evidence to suggest that such on street parking is not directly related to the college. The existing 40 space car park is at present fully utilised for college parking during college hours. The car park is linked to the college by a path up the valley side through the woods, or by a public footpath which runs along the rear of properties in Lauds Close which joins up with Paradise Road. Such parking is unrelated to the use of the sports fields but is related to the general use of the college.
- 6.15 For a sports hall of this size, the council would normally expect to see a car park of approximately 95 spaces. The existing car park has approximately 40 spaces. Such a shortfall of spaces would not normally be acceptable. The applicant contends that there is no intention to increase student numbers as a result of this development and that the building would not generate a requirement for any additional parking. The college already has a travel plan which has been re-examined and up dated to have regard to the application. However, the travel plan suggests that cycles should be encouraged but the 10 bike stands proposed in the application is well below the 105 stands which would comply with the standards. Without such provision, I consider that it is likely to mean that there will be further competition for the already fully utilised car park which will lead to further congestion in the area. The representations from near neighbours and my own personal observations indicate that there is already extensive on street parking in the immediate area and any increase in on street parking will exacerbate an already difficult situation. Consequently, I consider that on the basis of the information submitted, the development would be likely to increase parking congestion in the area.

Other issues

- 6.16 There is no evidence that any protected species or habitat will be adversely affected and therefore I do not consider that there are any ecological issues.

- 6.17 The applicant has confirmed that the building will be built to achieve a BREEAM rating of at least 'very good' which is in accordance with normal planning policy.
- 6.18 The applicant has indicated that the facility would not be used other than by nominated groups, to be agreed with the council, or Henley College. I believe that this could be controlled by an appropriate condition. Outside floodlights would require a further consent from the council and there is unlikely to be any such requirement as there are only grass pitches available for use.
- 6.19 The Police Crime Prevention Design Adviser requires certain works to be undertaken which can be covered by condition. These measures include works to the building itself to reduce opportunities for crime together with CCTV to deter other anti social behaviour. Therefore, despite some residents concerns about anti social behaviour, I do not consider a refusal of planning permission on these grounds is justified.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The site lies immediately adjacent to the Chilterns AONB and the proposal is to erect a large, bulky building beyond the confines of existing built development in Henley. Although it is for a building which would encourage sport and recreation, I do not consider that all other means of achieving the same result within the built up area with less impact on the AONB have been adequately examined. There is therefore insufficient justification to override the protection of the landscape. Furthermore, the development as submitted makes inadequate provision for cycle parking which would lead to further pressure for on street parking in an already congested area.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 **It is recommended that planning permission be refused for the following reasons:**
- 1. That the site lies immediately adjacent to the designated Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and having regard to the size of the building relative to its surroundings, the development would result in the erection of a substantial building beyond the well defined confines of existing built development which would detract from the rural character, appearance and landscape of the area, contrary to Policies G2, G4, C1, C2, C4, and R4 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan. Insufficient justification exists to permit such a building.**
 - 2. That, having regard to the lack of adequate cycle parking provision in the proposal and that the existing car park is already fully utilised, the development would be likely to result in increased car usage in the area. This would put additional strain on the local highway network to the detriment of the safety and convenience of other users of the highway and result in an unsustainable form of development with reduced opportunities for using alternative means of transport, contrary to Policies T1 and T2 of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan.**

Author M Moore
Contact No. 01491 823752
Email Add. planning@southoxon.gov.uk