

Hannah Smith

From: John Dolman
Sent: 04 July 2016 11:37
To: planning SBC
Subject: FW: 16/24242/FUL 42784 Retail Development, Westbridge Park Fitness Centre

Please scan into the above application - Sport England response.

Thanks

John

From: Maggie Taylor [mailto:Maggie.Taylor@sportengland.org]
Sent: 30 June 2016 16:04
To: John Dolman
Cc: Jim Arnold
Subject: 16/24242/FUL 42784 Retail Development, Westbridge Park Fitness Centre

Dear John,

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Sport England –Statutory Role and Policy

It is understood that the proposal prejudices the use, or leads to the loss of use, of land being used as a playing field or has been used as a playing field in the last five years, as defined in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (Statutory Instrument 2015 No. 595). The consultation with Sport England is therefore a statutory requirement.

Sport England has considered the application in the light of the National Planning Policy Framework (particularly Para 74) and Sport England's policy to protect playing fields, 'A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England' (see link below): www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy

Sport England's policy is to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of, all or any part of a playing field, unless one or more of the five exceptions stated in its policy apply.

The Proposal and Impact on Playing Field

The retail development impacts directly on three tennis courts that form part of Westbridge Park, providing an indoor sports centre with outdoor playing field and tennis courts in Stone. The leisure strategy for the park is to redevelop part of the site for retail to facilitate the replacement of the leisure centre with a modern facility which includes retention of the grass playing field area.

The balance to be assessed therefore relates to the impacts of the loss of tennis courts compared to the opportunity to replace the leisure centre and improve the park.

Assessment against Sport England Policy

The key consideration for this application is to advise whether the loss of the tennis courts is justified and adequately compensated by the upgrade of two grass courts in the town (Stonefield) to synthetic courts (adding capacity). The application includes an assessment of tennis court demand and supply but this needs to be considered in the light of the Councils own assessment of tennis court supply as well as its own robustness.

The SBC Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment Update (June 2013) confirms that there are 17 tennis courts in the north catchment (includes Stone) (compared to 24 in Stafford town). Provision is equivalent to 1 court per 3,300 residents. In Stone these include Stone Lawn Tennis and Squash Club (9 courts), Stonefield Park, St Dominic's Priory and Westbridge Park. The assessment does not identify surpluses in tennis provision and recommends expansion of tennis provision in North Stafford (to address increased demand from growth) but not in Stone given the Stone Lawn Tennis Club had spare capacity. Conclusions are that tennis provision should be provided as multi-courts going forward and existing courts/multi-courts should be floodlit to maximise capacity and address under use.

The assessment carried out by DPP Planning accompanying the planning application seeks to update the Councils assessment. However it is not regarded as being fully robust as the assessment area is very limited (comparing Stone with Stafford only) and there does not appear to have been consultation with the clubs, users or the LTA. It however has updated the figures demonstrating provision in Stone is 1 court per 1,200 residents compared to 1 court per 4,000 residents in Stafford. The case is that, given the quality of the courts at Westbridge are poor, that the recent upgrading of Stonefield Park courts has increased capacity of remaining tennis courts, the adequacy of residual supply in Stone and the benefits arising from providing an opportunity to replace the Westbridge Leisure Centre that the tennis provision will still meet demand and that the overall benefit to sport prevails – in effect meeting Exceptions E1 and E4 of our policy to protect playing field and NPPF Par 74 purpose of protecting sports facilities from loss.

In coming to a view Sport England has sought to consult the Lawn Tennis Association. A summary of their response is set out below:

Club tennis and community tennis are different environments of play and cater for different markets so within a town we feel it is important to have both and for these facilities to be spread throughout the town or city, rather than in just one area. Insight shows us that, particularly for community facilities, players want to be able to walk to courts in less than 15/20 minutes. Therefore having all the courts in the north of the town clustered at the tennis club would not be our preference.

Regarding club membership at Stone T&SC, this is currently at 158 members and has been fairly static around this mark for the past 7 years. As they have 6 floodlit all weather courts, our feeling would be that they are not operating close to capacity and could take on a much higher amount of members. However, as before, club membership is not appealing to all tennis players and the majority do play in parks so I feel it is important to provide a quality community option in the town.

If compensatory provision is to be considered, assuming a multi-use games facility is fit for purpose for tennis, so much more could be offered and achieved for tennis with 2 publically available courts than one. One court won't be attractive for a coach to run child and adult programmes as they won't be able to teach sufficient numbers to make it financially viable. It will also mean park players, who turn out on mass nationally between May-September, will be limited by court availability. The compensation of 1 court in the south of the town is clearly better than none but if a request for 2 could be made that would be my preference.

Sport England note that in addition to the tennis club site the Stonefield tennis courts (now upgraded) are available for public hire so there would be a remaining mix of club and public courts in Stone with the closure of the Westfield courts, however, whilst capacity appears to be adequate the loss of tennis courts on this site has a negative impact on the distribution and accessibility of tennis courts in the south of Stone, in that all of the remaining courts are in the north of the town.

Consequently Sport England does not entirely accept the courts are surplus to requirements, but to facilitate the delivery of the wider sporting benefits, will support the proposal as long as either 1-2 replacement courts are provided or access to existing tennis courts on a school site is secured in the south of Stone in order to meet Exception E4 of our policy to protect playing field.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Having assessed the proposals against exception E1 and E4, Sport England is of the view that the proposals do not currently meet either exception in full. However, if the following amendments were made we may be in a position to support the proposals:

- The provision of 1-2 replacement tennis courts (on or off site) or secured access for public use of 2 existing tennis courts on a school site in the south of Stone

Sport England would also like to be notified of the outcome of the application through the receipt of a copy of the decision notice.

The absence of an objection to this application in the context of the Town and Country Planning Act, does not in any way commit Sport England or any National Governing Body of Sport to support for any related funding application.

If you would like any further information or advice please contact me at the address below.

Yours sincerely,

Maggie Taylor

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