

APPLICATION REPORT – 19/00325/FUL

Validation Date: 5 April 2019

Ward: Clayton-le-Woods and Whittle-le-Woods

Type of Application: Full Planning

Proposal: Proposed car park

Location: Playing Field Kem Mill Lane Whittle-Le-Woods

Case Officer: Caron Taylor

Applicant: Whittle-le-Woods Parish Council

Agent: Chorley Borough Council

Consultation expiry: 8 May 2019

Decision due by: 31 May 2019

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that the application is approved.

SITE DESCRIPTION

2. The application site is located in the Green Belt on Kem Mill Lane, which is accessed off the A6 Preston Road. It is currently used as a grassed football pitch by Whittle-le-Woods Football Club. The application is required to be reported to committee as it is submitted by the Council.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1. The application seeks planning permission for the creation of a car park to serve the existing playing field. The proposal has been revised since the application was originally submitted and would be constructed of a porous plastic paving grid system for grass reinforcement.
2. The exiting access to the playing field is via a field gate and pedestrian gate on Kem Mill Lane, off the A6. This provides access to the site, and changing pavilion building which is located in the north east corner of the site close to the gate. Cars currently have to park on Kem Mill Lane when fixtures and training sessions are taking place. Visiting teams are asked to park on Whittle Cricket Club site further down the road. Kem Mill Lane is a narrow road and parked cars restrict access and cause congestion. The proposal would involve a revised access from Kem Mill Lane to allow vehicular access to the proposed car park and existing vegetation would be cut back to accommodate appropriate visibility splays. The car park would provide parking for approximately ten cars but would not be formally marked out and vehicles would be protected from stray balls by new ball stop fencing. No lighting is proposed.

REPRESENTATIONS

3. 14 representations have been received. 3 state that overall they support the application but have some concerns, 1 states their comments are neutral and the remaining 10 are objections. They raise the following issues:
- The present hedgerow should remain and be thickened with new plants. The cutting back of the land and shrubs away from Kem Mill Lane could increase the risk of flooding to the lane and the properties opposite. The banking up of the land was completed many years ago to prevent flood damage by making the recreation field a flood plain. This needs to be preserved and reinforced if anything;
 - The cutting back and removal of the shrubs and trees would take away the countryside feel of the lane. Also, surely the height of the trees and bushes needs to be kept as this acts as a barrier to balls coming on to the lane and properties opposite - health and safety;
 - When the parish council last had the hedge cut back the contractor took most of it away from behind the goal posts, including lots of high branches. This resulted in far more balls coming across the lane;
 - The repositioning of the gate would create more opportunities for the ball to be kicked through the opening onto the lane as it would be closer to the goal. Can further thought be given to that? The proposed gate would also not blend in well with a beautiful field. The old gateway would need to be filled in with enough high vegetation to cover the gap produced;
 - The road planings for a car park material sounds like a cheap and very basic surface. A greener option for the car park could be considered, as suggested by someone else. An environmentally and aesthetically pleasing and robust surface could be used, e.g. a ground reinforcement tile system - it would also give the car park a greener and more natural feel;
 - In addition to the mesh fencing, is it possible to install a vehicular barrier/bollards to prevent vehicle access to the rest of the playing field. This would increase security and prevent vehicular damage to ground around the carpark;
 - With almost every spare bit of land in Whittle having been lost to development I feel it is important to retain this field, which is designated as Green Belt land, as a grassed area and not turn part of it into a car park. There are ample parking facilities within a reasonable walking distance that could be used. i.e. Cuerden Valley car park, Factory Lane or by arrangement on Kem Mill car park only 200 metres away;
 - It appears from the planning application that is intended to have a locked barrier at the new entrance, but it is not clear if anyone else or group would have access to the proposed parking facility. It is understood the land was bequeathed to the people of Whittle for the enjoyment of everyone and not just for the football club. If this land is indeed for the use of the whole community then any car park constructed on it should also be available to all and not just on match days to a select group;
 - Why is extra parking needed as there is adequate parking in the vicinity? There are over 60-80 car parking spaces within walking distance. This is green belt land and they have had enough development on the village green belt already
 - The proposal does not comply with the purposes of preserving the setting and special character of historic towns in the NPPF;
 - No ecology report has been submitted which they feel it should have been given the location of the site, the mature hedgerows and trees;
 - Any hardsurfacing would stop water absorbing into the ground;
 - Why is it necessary to remove the nice existing gate and replace it with a metal barrier further along?;
 - Will the metal fence be an eyesore for the residents opposite?;
 - The loss of Green Belt status opens up the possibility for future development;
 - There has been insufficient consultation on the proposal.

CONSULTATIONS

4. Whittle-le-Woods Parish Council - Support the proposed works on the Whittle-le-Woods Playing Field (Trust) and have commented that this is a positive development which would

enhance the playing field by the provision of a small car park and, therefore, encourage the utilisation of the facility by all the residents of Whittle-le-Woods. The Parish Council also wish to ensure that due consideration is provided to the neighbours of the property and that all materials used are in keeping with the Green Belt area and the environment in general, and that property boundaries are not encroached upon in any way.

5. CIL Officers – Comment that the proposed development is not a chargeable development for the purposes of the Community Infrastructure Levy.
6. Lancashire County Council Highway Services - Have no objection to the application. They recommend planning conditions and the provision of three secure cycle places.
7. Sport England - Sport England raises no objection to this application which is considered to meet Exception 2 of their adopted Playing Fields Policy, subject to conditions relating to maintaining a 3 metre wide run off around the perimeter of the pitch, free from obstructions and of the same surface as the playing area; and the site management/operator undertaking a risk assessment to ensure the run off areas are safe and do not pose a risk of injury to a player or spectator.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of the development

8. The site is located in the Green Belt. A car park and associated netting would be classed as an engineering operation under paragraph 146 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Engineering operations are not inappropriate development in the Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.
9. The engineering works themselves would involve a car park constructed of a porous plastic paving grid system for grass reinforcement. An associated 2.4m high paladin style green mesh ball stop fence would be erected to prevent damage to vehicles on one side of the car park. At the entrance would be a field gate.
10. Whilst the test for sites such as this relates to preserving openness it is important to note that the Framework contains no specific definition of 'openness'. The car park would be sited on an existing grassed area next to the existing entrance to the site. The creation of hardstanding amounts to surface treatment and effectively preserves the openness of the Green Belt. The fencing comprises a linear structure that is of negligible volume and is of weld mesh, which allows for a high degree of inter-visibility and does not impact on openness.
11. An assessment must also be made against the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Paragraph 134 of The Framework states that Green Belt serves five purposes:
 - a) *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
 - b) *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
 - c) *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
 - d) *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
 - e) *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.'*
12. In this case:
13. Purpose a) (to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas). The application site is not in a large built-up area;
14. Purpose b) (to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another). It would not result in neighbouring towns merging;
15. Purpose c) (to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;). The site is largely screened and the car park would be positioned between the existing road and

pavilion building. As such the surfacing works and fencing would occupy the space between the highway and the developed part of the site, and would not therefore result in any further encroachment over and above that which already exists.

16. Purpose d) (to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;). It is not set within an historic town; and
17. Purpose e) (to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land). Is not applicable in this case.
18. It is not considered there is any other harm caused by the proposal.
19. It is considered that the proposed development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt in accordance with paragraph 146 of the Framework. The proposals do not, therefore, represent inappropriate development within this Green Belt location.

Loss of playing fields

20. Policy HW2 of Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 states: Land and buildings currently or last used as, or ancillary to, open space or sports and recreational facilities will be protected unless:
 - Alternative facilities of an equivalent or enhanced standard are provided nearby before the existing facilities cease to be available; or
 - It can be demonstrated that the loss of the site would not lead to a deficit of provision in the local area in terms of quantity and accessibility; and
 - The site is not identified as being of high quality and / or high value in the Open Space Study; and
 - It can be demonstrated that retention of the site is not required to satisfy a recreational need in the local area; and
 - The site does not make a significant contribution to the character of an area in terms of visual amenity.
21. The proposed development would result in the loss of a small parcel of playing field, however the development would be minor in nature and ancillary to the principal use of the site as a playing field. The area of development represents the frontage to the site and the land is unsuitable for pitches and, therefore, does not affect the quantity or quality of pitches or adversely affect their use.
22. The playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins) would be maintained. In addition, policy HW1 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 does allow for ancillary development of existing sports facilities providing it will enhance the recreational/amenity value; does not detract from the character of the open space; will not have a detrimental effect on any site of nature conservation value and does not result in the loss of another sporting facility on the site. Given the location of the car park and its limited size it is considered the proposal meets the criteria of this policy.
23. Sport England raises no objection to this application providing a 3 metre wide run off around the perimeter of the pitch, free from obstructions and of the same surface as the playing area is maintained. This is provided for on the plans. They also ask that the site management/operator undertakes a risk assessment to ensure the run off areas are safe and do not pose a risk of injury to a player or spectator. This is not a planning matter, but the applicant has been made aware of it.

Highway safety

24. It is proposed to relocate the existing access to the application site in order to improve highway visibility splays and ensure that vehicles can fully pull off the adopted highway if the gates are closed and locked. This would involve the gate being set back from the highway so a vehicle can pull clear of it while the gate is opened and closed and does not, therefore, block the road while this takes place. This is considered acceptable.

Landscaping

25. The boundary of the application site to the south east is flanked by existing trees and shrubs forming a landscape screen. To the north west the site boundaries are more open in character with scattered trees and shrubs located along the banks of the River Lostock. To the north east the boundary of the application site is also more open in character with a narrow belt of scattered trees and shrubs combined with a post and wire mesh fence flanking Kem Mill Lane.
26. The relocation of the access would require the removal of some of the boundary vegetation on the application site along Kem Mill Lane in the form of existing hedgerow and native shrubbery. The applicant advises the existing access point was changed to improve the visibility splays for leaving the site and so is considered necessary. However, the proposal incorporates replacement native planting, including three heavy standard trees, to provide additional screening to the car park and the existing changing facility which is considered acceptable.

Drainage

27. The proposed car park would be constructed of a porous plastic paving grid system for so surface water would infiltrate through it. This is considered acceptable as it is in accordance with the drainage hierarchy set out in the Planning Practice Guidance.

Ecology

28. An ecology report has not been undertaken. The proposed development would require the cutting back of trees (general maintenance) and removal of a short section of hedgerow/hedgerow trees. It is however considered reasonable and necessary to impose a condition ensuring that works do not take place during the bird breeding season unless it has and appropriate survey that concludes that no breeding birds, active nests, eggs or fledglings are present has been undertaken.

Other matters

29. In relation to balls being more likely to be kicked onto the lane, it is considered that the erection of new ball stop fencing would help to prevent this.
30. Following discussions with the applicant it has been agreed to amend the proposed metal vehicular barrier and use a field gate. This is considered a positive move which would sit more comfortably with the rural surroundings.
31. It is not considered necessary to install additional vehicular barriers/bollards to prevent vehicular access to the rest of the playing field. The vehicular gate to the site would only be unlocked when the playing field is in use by organised groups and would be locked at other times. It is considered, therefore, that use of the playing field by vehicles is unlikely.
32. In terms of the amount of parking within the local vicinity, the Parish Council have reported complaints from local residents due to football players and spectators parking along Kem Mill Lane at present on match days causing congestion on Kem Mill Lane.
33. At present there is only pedestrian access to the site by the existing gates. Pedestrian access to the site will not change as a result of this proposal. The pedestrian gate would remain unlocked at all times as it is at present so access to the playing field would be available at all times. The car park would only be available during the times the vehicular gate is unlocked. Keys would be controlled by the Parish Council. The locking or unlocking of the gate is not a planning matter but if other people or groups wish to make use of the parking facilities this can be discussed with the Parish Council as they would consider giving vehicular gate keys to other groups wishing to use the car park.
34. The ball stop fence is made of green mesh of a type commonly used on school playing fields and playing pitches which allows views through it. It is not considered it would have an unacceptable visual impact.

35. The applicant advises that the proposal has been discussed with the neighbours opposite the site prior to submission including copies of the plans being sent to them.

CONCLUSION

36. The application is considered acceptable in principle in the Green Belt and the details of the proposal are also considered acceptable subject to conditions. The application is, therefore, recommended for approval.

RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE SITE

Ref: 04/00156/FUL **Decision:** PERFPF **Decision Date:** 19 March 2004
Description: Erection of changing rooms and pavilion.

RELEVANT POLICIES: In accordance with s.38 (6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), the application is to be determined in accordance with the development plan (the Central Lancashire Core Strategy, the Adopted Chorley Local Plan 2012-2026 and adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance), unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Consideration of the proposal has had regard to guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the development plan. The specific policies/guidance considerations are contained within the body of the report.

Suggested conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans below:

Title	Plan Ref	Received On
Proposed Revised Access and Car Parking Site Layout	KMLPF_001 Rev C	3 July 2019
Proposed Vehicle Barrier Gate	KMLPF_003 Rev A	7 June 2019
Proposed Fencing and Surfacing Detail	KMLPF_002 Rev A	3 July 2019
Location Plan	N/A	5 April 2019
Proposed Landscaping	KMLPF_004	5 April 2019

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

2. Any vegetation clearance required by the scheme should be carried out outside of the optimum period for bird nesting (March to July inclusive), unless an appropriate survey is undertaken that concludes that no breeding birds, active nests, eggs or fledglings are present in the area to be cleared has been undertaken.

Reason: All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) while they are breeding.

3. Before the development hereby permitted is first brought into use, the 3 no. wall mounted cycle loops as shown on the approved site layout plan shall be installed and made available for use.

Reason: To ensure adequate on site provision for cycle parking.

4. The proposed development must be begun not later than three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

5. All planting and seeding comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of any buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the earlier, and any trees or plants which within a

period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species..

Reason: In the interest of the appearance of the locality.