

APPLICATION REPORT – 19/00670/CB3MAJ

Validation Date: 11 July 2019

Ward: Astley And Buckshaw

Type of Application: Major Chorley Regulation 3

Proposal: Erection of sports pavilion and engineering operations including the layout out of a full size artificial grass pitch, 100m sprint straight, grass football pitches, children's play area and 90 space car park with additional over-spill provision.

Location: West Way Playing Fields West Way Astley Village

Case Officer: Mr Iain Crossland

Applicant: Chorley Council

Agent: Mr Dean Woodward, Steve Wells Associates Ltd

Consultation expiry: 27 September 2019

Decision due by: 10 October 2019

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

2. The application site comprises grass pitch playing fields that are located in the settlement area of Chorley to the west of residential development at Astley Village and with open agricultural land beyond the site to the west. The character of the area is generally suburban residential at the fringe of the urban area, and the site is bound by West Way to the west from which vehicular access is gained. There are trees to the periphery of the site and a water course to the north.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3. This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a sports pavilion and engineering operations including the layout out of a full size artificial grass pitch, 100m sprint straight, grass football pitches, children's play area and 90 space car park with additional over-spill provision.
4. The sports pavilion would be located adjacent to the car park near to West Way and would be a single storey building of modern design measuring approximately 400 square metres. The building would comprise changing facilities, a flexible use space and kitchen in addition to space for storage, plant and circulation.
5. The artificial pitch would be located adjacent to the car park near to West Way. This would comprise a full size pitch surrounded by 4.5m high ball stop fencing and 8 x 15m high floodlight columns. The 100m sprint track facility would be located to the east of the artificial pitch and the grass pitches would be between the sprint track and housing. There would be two equipment stores adjacent to the artificial pitch.

6. The children's play area would be positioned to the south of the artificial pitch and east of the pavilion. The details of the play equipment are not specified.
7. The car park would extend along the western boundary of the site and would be hard surfaced and marked out for 90 car parking spaces with some landscaping interspersed throughout. There would be an overspill parking area to the south east of the main car park that would enable parking for an additional 64 parking spaces through grass reinforcement.

REPRESENTATIONS

8. No representations have been received.

CONSULTATIONS

9. Astley Village Parish Council: No comments have been received.
10. Greater Manchester Ecology Unit: Have no objection subject to conditions.
11. Waste & Contaminated Land: Have confirmed that they have no comments to make.
12. Lancashire Highway Services: Comments to follow.
13. Lead Local Flood Authority: Have no objection subject to conditions.
14. Sport England: Comments to follow.
15. United Utilities: Have no objection subject to conditions.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of the development

16. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay.
17. Of particular relevance to the proposed development is paragraph 96 of Framework that states *"Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities[...]"*.
18. Paragraph 97 of the Framework goes on to state *"Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: [...] b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use."*
19. The Central Lancashire Core Strategy policy 24 covers sport and recreation and seeks to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access good sport, physical activity and recreation facilities (including children's play) by d) identifying sites for major new facilities where providers have evidence of need.
20. The application site is located in the settlement area of Astley Village. The Chorley Local Plan 2012 - 2026 states that within the settlement areas excluded from the Green Belt, and identified on the Policies Map, there is a presumption in favour of appropriate sustainable development.
21. Policy HW2 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 – 2026 seeks to protect existing open space and states that land and buildings currently or last used as, or ancillary to, open space or sports

and recreational facilities will be protected unless certain criteria can be met. This approach is reflected and supported in the Framework.

22. The application site is an existing sport and recreation facility, however, the proposed development seeks to upgrade the sports facilities on a comprehensive basis across the entire site. It is, therefore, considered that the proposal is more akin to the provision of new facilities that seek to make more effective use of the available area and is most appropriately assessed under policy HW1 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 – 2026, which covers the provision of new open space, sport and recreational facilities.
23. Policy HW1 states that proposals for the provision of new open space, sport and recreational facilities or extensions to existing facilities will be permitted if all criteria of the policy are met. These are set out and addressed as follows:
24. *The development will not have an adverse impact on the local environment or visual character of the landscape;*
The site is well defined and contained between West Way and housing at Astley Village. There is also mature landscaping to the north and west of the site, which filters external views and result in a good degree of enclosure. As such the proposed development would not result in any harmful incursion into the landscape. The most notable visual element of the proposal from outside the site would be the floodlights. These would be mounted on 15m high monopoles. Given their slender nature these would be unobtrusive during daylight hours, but would have some impact when in use during darker times. Although the floodlights would have a visual impact when in use, they would be viewed against the backdrop of tall street lighting along West Way, and their hours of use would be controlled by condition preventing prolonged use throughout the night. It is, therefore, considered that there would be no adverse impact on the local environment or visual character of the landscape.
25. *The development will not result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3);*
The soil type in the area is Grade 3 agricultural land but more detailed information as to whether it is 'best and most versatile' (i.e. whether it is Grade 3a or 3b) is not available. However, the site is already in use for recreational purposes (playing field) and is not available for agriculture.
26. *The development will not cause harm to a site of nature conservation value;*
A number of surveys have been provided by the applicant, which have been assessed by Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, who confirm that no significant ecological issues were identified by the ecological consultants, and they have not reason to doubt these assessments. A more detailed assessment is carried out below.
27. *The development will not harm the amenities of local residents;*
The proposal is for the redevelopment of the existing playing field to include a full size artificial grass pitch, 100m sprint straight, grass football pitches, four team changing pavilion and 90 space car park with additional overspill provision. This would improve the quality of and access to sports provision in the area adding to the amenities available to local people. The impact of the development on the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers is assessed below.
28. *The site is accessible by a choice of means of transport other than the private car and the traffic generated would not have a severe impact on the highway network.*
The site is within walking/cycling distance of residents of Astley Village and the local community and the pedestrian and cycle links are good. Cycle storage is included in the proposal to encourage use. It is noted that public transport is limited, however, the site is already in use as playing fields.
29. Overall, it is considered that this proposal would improve access to high quality open space and opportunities for sport and physical activity through the comprehensive upgrade of an existing facility in line with the Framework, policy 24 of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy

and policy HW1 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 – 2026 and is, therefore, acceptable in principle.

Design and impact on the character of the area

30. The application site is well contained by a residential development to the east and landscaping to the north, west and south. The site currently comprises grassed playing fields and a rough surfaced car parking area. The character of the site would remain that of a playing field, however, the proposal would introduce buildings and structures as described above. These would have the effect of reducing the open nature of the site, however, such an impact would not be harmful to the character of the area, given the site is well contained. The use of low-level buildings and green mesh fencing would further reduce the impact of these structures. The floodlights would be the more visible elements of the proposal but would be viewed in the context of similar structures that provide lighting to West Way. As such they would not be harmful to the character of the area.
31. The development is, therefore, considered to be in accordance with policy BNE1 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 - 2026.

Impact on residential amenity

32. The artificial pitch, which comprises floodlights and fencing would be located approximately 90m from the nearest properties at Great Meadow to the east. This is a significant degree of separation such that there would be no impact from the structures themselves. The illuminance surveys that have been provided in support of the application demonstrate that there would be no light spill within the vicinity of any residential properties. There would, therefore, be no unacceptable impact on amenity through light nuisance.
33. The proposed pavilion is a significant distance from the nearest dwelling and is of such modest scale that there would be no impact on any residential occupiers from this building.
34. The site itself is already in use for playing fields and, therefore, already has some impact through noise and disturbance on nearby properties. It is recognised that the intensity of the use would increase as a result of the introduction of an artificial pitch with floodlights that can be used more extensively. It is noted, however, that the artificial pitch facility itself would be located some distance from the nearest dwellings and is not, therefore, considered to present a harmful impact through noise and disturbance. The play area is located a similar distance away and again would result in no harmful impact as a result.

Highway safety

35. The proposed development would result in the erection of a sports pavilion and engineering operations including the layout out of a full size artificial grass pitch (AGP), 100m sprint straight, grass football pitches, and a children's play area. There would be on site parking provision for 90 cars, two coaches and four mini-buses, with an overspill facility for a further 64 cars. The site is currently used by football teams using the site at weekends and for event parking to support activities at Astley Hall. Parking is on the grass but off the playing pitches and are unmarked and informal. Vehicular access is from West Way, which would remain.
36. Typically, and for weekday winter evening training, the AGP would be divided into four with each quarter capable of accommodating a squad of up to 12 junior footballers. With a team, managers and coaches, the likely maximum occupancy of the AGP at any one hour during a weekday winter evening would be no more than 60.
37. Alongside the use of the AGP, the compact athletic facility is likely to attract an anticipated maximum of 24 users per hour.
38. The applicant contends that with a typical local planning authority assessment for participant to car ratio of 2:1, the parking requirements for these numbers would be 42 spaces. However, to accommodate numbers at changeover times between 'hourly slots' booked on the AGP, this number is doubled with a need to accommodate up to 84 vehicles.

39. The majority of the weekday winter evening use of the AGP and the compact athletics facility would be between 18:00 and 22:00 hrs. The grass playing pitches would not be in use at these times.
40. It is considered that an adequate amount of off street car parking would be provided through the proposed development and it is anticipated that the proposed development would not have a significant impact on highway safety, capacity or amenity in the immediate vicinity of the site over and above the existing situation.

Ecology

41. The application is accompanied by an ecology assessment of the site. This has been reviewed by the Council's ecology advisors (Greater Manchester Ecology Unit) who advise that no significant ecological issues were identified by the ecological consultants. Issues relating to bats, amphibians, proximity to Euxton Brook, nesting birds, Himalayan balsam and landscaping can be resolved via conditions and informatives.
42. Three trees that would be removed were identified as having low bat roosting potential. Pre-cautionary measures have been proposed for their removal. These should be conditioned as part of any permission.
43. The western and northern boundaries have been identified as potential foraging and commuting routes. No direct impacts are proposed to the northern boundary with some tree loss to the west though the emergence surveys carried out on the three trees found little activity along this boundary at the time. The main impact, however, is likely to be from floodlighting of the artificial pitch. Lux plans have been produced for the floodlighting that indicates no impact on the western boundary but potentially significant impacts on parts of the northern boundary. However, the impacts are only over short distance and not across the entire belt of trees and would also be only temporary during usage primarily October to March when bats are less active. GMEU, therefore, raise no objection to proposed lighting scheme, subject to a condition over the hours of operation.
44. Surveys in 2016 found no evidence of great crested newts. eDNA analysis in 2019, however, provided one positive result for pond 1. This, however, has been interpreted as a false positive by the ecological consultants based on previous surveys, their assessment of the pond and the fact that all other eDNA results for this pond were negative. Given the nature of the pond which contains fish, these conclusions are accepted.
45. Common toad were recorded on the site, which are a UK Biodiversity Priority Species and, therefore, a material consideration for planning. It is proposed that a reasonable avoidance method statement be produced to reduce the impact of the development during construction on this species. This is supported and it is recommended that a condition is attached to any grant of planning permission requiring a method statement to be provided.
46. No potential impacts are anticipated on any other protected species. There was no evidence of badgers found on the site in 2015 and whilst this survey is now out of date, given the nature of the site, primarily playing field, their presence would be easily detected and the consultants have since returned to the site to inspect trees for bats and the ponds, with no mention of any badgers. It is, therefore, considered that risks are low.
47. Trees and scrub would be removed to facilitate the development, which would have a potential bird nesting habitat. All British birds nests and eggs (with certain limited exceptions) are protected by Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended. It is, therefore, recommended that a condition is attached to any grant of planning permission preventing works to buildings, trees and hedges during the bird nesting season.
48. Himalayan balsam was identified on the site in 2015 along the northern boundary. This species is highly mobile and may have extended its range over the last four years. It is, therefore, recommended that a resurvey is carried out prior to any earthworks and that a condition requiring this and a method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures be attached to any grant of planning permission.

49. The EU Water Framework Directive requires environmental objectives to be set for all surface and ground waters to enable them to achieve good status or potential for heavily modified water bodies by a defined date. One objective is to prevent further deterioration, which can include changes to flow pattern, width and depth of channel, sediment availability/transport and ecology and biology. No direct impacts would occur to Euxton Brook and the wooded buffer is significant and adequate to prevent any impacts during construction. It is noted, however, that the proposal is to drain surface water from the site in to the brook post development, with the potential for negative impacts from increased nutrient levels, pollutant levels, sediment loads and flow fluctuations. Measures are proposed to prevent flow fluctuations from the AGP. Drainage from the car parks would also be directed towards the Euxton Brook, but there are no details provided at this stage. It is, therefore, recommend that a condition is attached to any grant of planning permission requiring that details are provided as to the impact on the ecological status of Euxton Brook and any mitigation measures that may be required to protect it.
50. Section 170 of the Framework states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The proposed development would result in the loss of small areas of young woodland and large areas of amenity grassland. Landscape tree planting is proposed across the developed site, which if native would partially mitigate for loss of trees. It is recommended that in order to achieve net gain a management plan be provided for the retained woodland and brook corridor along with the provision of a nest box scheme in the woods and control of invasive species. It is recommended that a condition requiring an appropriate landscaping and environmental management plan is attached to any grant of planning permission.

Drainage

51. The proposed development would introduce areas of hard surfacing that do not currently exist on site, and the proposed surface water drainage would convey roof, car park and artificial grass pitch (AGP) drainage into a new surface water network. The preferred method of surface water discharge would be via a headwall into Euxton Brook. Attenuation would, however, be provided to reduce the rate and volume of surface water run off into the brook following storm events through construction layers in the artificial pitch, a swale, and a basin.
52. The artificial grass carpet, its backing, the macadam base, the stone sub-base and the geotextile are all porous. Rainwater falling onto the surface of the AGP would percolate down through the sub-base to the formation level below, to the piped land drainage system, and then to the outfall. Ground investigation and infiltration tests indicate that the ground is heavy clay and that a soakaway would be ineffective. However, there is evidence of a previous land drainage scheme on this site and an outfall into the Euxton Brook to the north of the proposed AGP. While the whole of the AGP has a significant capacity in its stone base, it is proposed that this outfall is cleaned out and surface water drainage from the AGP directed north to this outlet.
53. Surface water from the macadam car park would be directed via road gullies through petrol interceptors and then attenuation before out-falling into Euxton Brook. Roof water as well as surface water from the surrounding paths and hard surfaces would be linked to the car park drainage system.
54. Further details would be required to confirm the specific flow rates, attenuation volumes and specific storage features and structures, which must adhere to the requirements of the Lead Local Flood Authority.
55. The Lead Local Flood Authority are satisfied with this approach subject to further details and a drainage strategy being provided by condition.

CONCLUSION

56. The proposed development would enhance the recreational potential of the existing open space. It would not impact unacceptably on the overall appearance and character of the area and there would be no harmful impact on neighbour amenity over and above the current situation. Nor would there be any harmful impact on highway safety, ecology or surface water drainage that cannot be addressed through appropriate conditions. On this basis it is recommended that planning permission be granted subject to conditions.

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:

To follow

RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE SITE

Ref: 98/00479/COU **Decision:** PERFPP **Decision Date:** 14 October 1998

Description: Use of land for siting of two changing rooms and one storage container,

Ref: 19/00763/CB3MAJ **Decision:** PCO **Decision Date:** Pending

Description: Playing pitch improvements including the installation of primary and secondary drainage and associated landscaping works.