

## **APPLICATION REPORT – 20/00132/CB3**

**Validation Date: 12 February 2020**

**Ward: Astley And Buckshaw**

**Type of Application: Chorley Regulation 3**

**Proposal: Construction of compact athletics facility and installation of associated storage containers**

**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: 5 March 2020**

**Decision due by: 5 June 2020**

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### **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.
3. It is noted that planning permission was granted in October 2019 for the erection of a sports pavilion and engineering operations including the laying out of a full size artificial grass pitch, grass football pitches, children's play area and 90 space car park with additional over-spill provision under application reference 19/00670/CB3MAJ, and playing pitch improvements including the installation of primary and secondary drainage and associated landscaping works under application reference 19/00763/CB3MAJ.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

4. This application seeks full planning permission for the construction of a compact athletics facility and installation of associated storage containers, as part of the previously approved developments. This would comprise a 100m sprint track facility, and long jump pit with runway that would be located to the east of the artificial pitch. There would be three equipment stores comprising 6.1m by 2.4m containers adjacent to the artificial pitch located to the north, south and west of the pitch. The facility would be contained within a 4.5m high weld mesh fence to match that previously approved as part of the application for the artificial pitch.

## REPRESENTATIONS

5. No representations have been received.

## CONSULTATIONS

6. Astley Village Parish Council: No comments have been received.
7. Sport England: Have no objection subject to conditions.
8. Greater Manchester Ecology Unit: Recommend conditions.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

### Principle of the development

9. 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.
10. 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[...].”*
11. 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.”*
12. 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.
13. The application site is located in the settlement area of Chorley. 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.
14. 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.
15. The application site is an existing sport and recreation facility, however, the proposed development seeks to upgrade the sports facilities on a comprehensive basis as part of previously approved developments 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.
16. 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:
17. *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, however, these were approved as part of planning permission 19/00670/CB3MAJ. 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.

18. *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.

19. *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 no reason to doubt these assessments. A more detailed assessment is carried out below.

20. *The development will not harm the amenities of local residents;*

The proposal would form part of a wider redevelopment of the existing playing fields 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.

21. *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.

22. Overall, it is considered that this proposal would improve access to high quality open space and opportunities for sport and physical activity as part of 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

23. 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 a number of 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.

24. The development is, therefore, considered to be in accordance with policy BNE1 of the Chorley Local Plan 2012 - 2026.

#### Impact on residential amenity

25. The floodlights would be located approximately 90m from the nearest properties at Great Meadow to the east, whilst the fencing to the track would be located approximately 70m from these properties. 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.
26. 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 duration of the use would increase as a result of the introduction of floodlighting, however, the 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.

#### Highway safety

27. Cumulatively, alongside the previously approved developments, 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.
28. 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.
29. Alongside the use of the AGP, the compact athletic facility is likely to attract an anticipated maximum of 24 users per hour.
30. 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.
31. The majority of the weekday winter evening use of the AGP and the compact athletics facility would be between 18:00 and 22:00 hours. The grass playing pitches would not be in use at these times.
32. It is considered that an adequate amount of off street car parking would be provided as part of the overall redevelopment of the site, and it is anticipated that such 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

33. The previously approved application was accompanied by an ecology assessment of the site. This was reviewed by the Council's ecology advisors (Greater Manchester Ecology Unit) who advised that no significant ecological issues were identified by the ecological consultants. The new application extends the impact of the floodlighting to the east, which is not considered to be an issue subject to the application of the agreed lux levels.
34. The western and northern boundaries have been identified as potential foraging and commuting routes. No direct impacts are proposed to the western and northern boundary through this proposal. The main impact, however, is likely to be from floodlighting. 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.

35. 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.
36. 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.
37. A small amount of 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.
38. 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 condition be attached to any grant of planning permission ensuring that works are carried out in accordance with an approved method statement detailing eradication and/or control and/or avoidance measures.
39. 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 into the brook post development. It is, therefore, recommended that a condition is attached to any grant of planning permission requiring that appropriate mitigation measures are followed in order to protect the ecological status of Euxton Brook.
40. 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 amenity grassland and a small amount of rough grassland and scrub to the north, though this was already to be lost as part of the previously approved development. The impacts are, however, cumulative with the adjacent losses of amenity grassland, which should be reflected in the ecological enhancement measures for the overall soft landscape proposals. It is recommended that a condition requiring an appropriate landscaping and environmental management plan is attached to any grant of planning permission.

#### Drainage

41. The proposed development would introduce areas of hard surfacing that do not currently exist on site, and the proposed surface water drainage covering the whole of the site would convey roof, car park, track 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.
42. 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.

43. 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.
44. Details of the specific flow rates, attenuation volumes and specific storage features and structures have been confirmed as part of the previously approved development on the site. The drainage associated with the compact athletic facilities proposed here would form part of these arrangements.

## CONCLUSION

45. The proposed development would enhance the recreational potential of the existing open space and previously approved development. 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 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:** 19/00670/CB3MAJ      **Decision:** PERFPP      **Decision Date:** 10 October 2019  
**Description:** Erection of sports pavilion and engineering operations including the laying out of a full size artificial grass pitch, grass football pitches, children's play area and 90 space car park with additional over-spill provision.

**Ref:** 19/00763/CB3MAJ      **Decision:** PERFPP      **Decision Date:** 10 October 2019  
**Description:** Playing pitch improvements including the installation of primary and secondary drainage and associated landscaping works.

**Ref:** 20/00252/DIS      **Decision:** PCO      **Decision Date:** Pending  
**Description:** Application to discharge conditions nos. 8 (method statement for amphibians), 10 (invasive species method statement) 11 (surface water disposal details), 12 (landscaping and environmental management scheme), 15 (surface water drainage scheme), 16 (site access scheme), 22 (sporting continuity) and 24 (compound reinstatement) attached to planning permission 19/00670/CB3MAJ (Erection of sports pavilion and engineering operations including the laying out of a full size artificial grass pitch, grass football pitches, children's play area and 90 space car park with additional over-spill provision.)

**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