



**Proof of Evidence of Paul Warren
BA (Hons) DIPLA CMLI**

Landscape Matters

LAND SOUTH OF THE A271 AND
EAST OF THE A22, LOWER
HORSEBRIDGE, HAILSHAM

Appendix F

Extracts from Sports Hub
WD_2023_2100_DC Officer Report (Full
document available CD 11.1)

Appellant: Hertfordshire Holdings
Ltd.

Planning Inspectorate No. Appeal:
APP/C1435/W/23/3335625

Wealden District Council Application
No. WD/2022/3222/MAO

March 2024

For: Planning Committee South
Date: 25 January 2024

WD/2023/2100/DC - LAND AT KNIGHTS FARM EAST, LOWER HORSEBRIDGE, HAILSHAM

Summary of Proposal

District Council Application for:-

FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SPORTS HUB FACILITY, INCLUDING TWO ARTIFICIAL FOOTBALL PITCHES, TWO MULTI-USE GAMES AREAS (CONTAINING FOUR TENNIS COURTS AND FOUR NETBALL COURTS), TWO PADEL TENNIS COURTS, SKATE PARK, PLAY FACILITIES AND A SPORTS BUILDING PROVIDING CHANGING ROOMS, TOILETS AND CAFÉ, ALONGSIDE PARKING, LANDSCAPING, DRAINAGE, ANCILLARY WORKS AND VEHICULAR ACCESS VIA THE A267.

Received date: 29 August 2023
8/13 week date: 29 January 2024

Parish: Hellingly
Ward: Hellingly
Grid Ref: 557254 111553

Link to website:

<https://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=163100>
<https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=660>

Recommendation

The application is recommended for:

- (a) **APPROVAL**, subject to Confirmation from Natural England that they agree with the Council's Appropriate Assessment that there would be no likely significant effect on the protected sites at the Pevensey Levels.

Completion of a Section 106 agreement to secure in a timely manner for the following:

- Off-site highway works would be agreed under a S278 agreement with the local Highway Authority including:
- The new access junction with ghost island right-turn lane and visibility splays on the A267.
- The bus stop infrastructure works on A271 Lower Horsebridge;
- Footway and pedestrian crossing improvements on A271 Lower Horsebridge;
- Travel Plan including an audit fee.
- A financial contribution towards maintaining/improving bus services of £371,210.
- Legal Agreement monitoring and registration fees

OR

- (b) That in the event of being unable to secure completion of the S106 within a timescale considered reasonable then the application be REFUSED for the following reason:

Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which at Chapter 12, sets the national agenda for 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. This, in particular requires the significance of any heritage asset to be identified and assessed that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) and for this to inform future change in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Conservation Areas

The Council has a duty (with respect to any buildings or other land) to have special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area (Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). This requirement is reinforced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which at Chapter 12, sets the national agenda for 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. This, in particular requires the significance of any heritage asset to be identified and assessed that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) and for this to inform future change in order to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

Visual Impact

The site is located within the LCA '3A: Uckfield to Hailsham Wooded Clay Vale' in the Landscape Character Assessment (2022) which forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan. This is the most up to date assessment of the character of the landscape. It recognises the site is within part of the LCA which is characterised by a rural landscape but is somewhat diminished by the proximity to Hailsham, the A22 to the south and the junction with the A267 which is to the west of the site and A271 to the south framing the site with sporadic residential developments. The Bo Ship Travelodge, petrol filling station and food and beverage outlets adjacent on it on the western side of the A267 also influence the character here.

It also acknowledges that the landscape is characterised by the rivers within the LCA, which includes the Cuckmere to the east of the site. Scattered remnants of woodland and semi-natural grassland exist. Although, the site is not wooded and is predominately semi-improved grassland used for grazing historically. Irregular field patterns, some of which are sinuous in nature exist, as is the case with the application site with the curve to the western boundary framed by the A267. A number of mature trees exist on the site and around its site boundaries and a hedgerow forms a strong sense of enclosure along the western boundary. The LCA recognising these provide landscape structure and habitat connectivity. Historically the landscape has been fieldscape.

The Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain the distinct characteristics of the settlements which exist within the Parish. In this instance, the most relevant being the settlements of Lower Dicker to the south east and Lower Horsebridge to the east of the site, noting that the site falls between these and not within either character area.

Amongst the forces for change identified in the Assessment, the LCA is susceptible to expansion of Hailsham and an increase in light industrial and urban fringe land uses which would reduce the rural character of the landscape.

Guidelines in the Assessment for LCA 3A outline the following key objectives (in summary where applicable to the site):

- Retain and enhance biodiversity including restoration of buffer strips along watercourses;
- Conserve, manage and restore riverside vegetation and wetland habitats;
- Improve connectivity of woodlands across the LCA including in the River Cuckmere Habitat Link;
- Protect and manage existing hedgerow network and plan for restoration and connectivity and encourage conservation of field patterns and boundary features;
- Use woodland planting to screen development on the edge of settlements;
- Consider impact of urban fringe development from Hailsham on existing landscape and ensure sensitive and integrated urban edge;
- Ensure road upgrades take account of their rural context;
- Ensure that renewable energy is compatible in scale with the landscape (where possible); and,
- Maintain the landscape away from the large urban areas on the boundary with the LCA and the A22, retaining tranquillity and dark skies where present.

The above objectives are reinforced by saved local plan policies EN8 and EN27, alongside policy HNPD 4 of the Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan which seeks to protect and enhance existing green and blue infrastructure.

It is acknowledged that the proposed development would alter the character of this undeveloped parcel of land, including as views across and appreciation from private garden areas of properties backing onto the site, the public right of way to the east and filtered views through existing landscaping to be retained, would be visible and the development would alter the character of the site. It should also be recognised that there are existing visual detractors as identified above and it is recognised that urban land uses could be unacceptable in this location. However, the retention of existing mature boundary features which form a sense of enclosure, together with the buffer zone of around the developed area of the site and the site boundaries with significant landscaping reinforcing this would aid the assimilation of the development. Further, given the nature of the development, this would not be an unacceptable urban land use, recognised as green infrastructure, of a scale which would not be possible to accommodate in an urban location within a development boundary elsewhere within the District. The latter point is a weighty consideration and effectively limits site selection to an urban fringe greenfield location. So saying, there is no requirement to sequentially assess alternative sites, the development must be assessed on its merits in relation to policy as submitted before us.

The development is one which is not unexpected in a rural-urban fringe location. The integration of this would be through the careful consideration paid

to the retention of existing boundary features and reinforcement to act as a buffer with these features. The provision of green infrastructure in the form of leisure facilities, buffered with these additional landscape enhancements with linked biodiversity benefits, delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits. These would benefit nature, climate and local and wider communities as set out in the NPPF. This would introduce a form of development of this nature, scale and form which would not be at odds with the LCA objectives set out above.

The proposal envisages a large-scale provision of sports and outdoor leisure provision within a largely landscaped setting with some necessary but nonetheless well-articulated and laid out parking provision with the principle access for non-motorised access for pedestrians and cyclists to the south of the site where the level of change would be less discernible as a result and not unexpected in this location. The main vehicular access from the A267 to the north-west of the site where existing visual detractors identified above mean that as a whole, the development would not result in a form of development which would be incompatible. This as a result of the layout and scale and intervening landscaping which acts as a buffer between the Sports Park and the A267.

Improvements to pedestrian connectivity would result in widening of the footway along the southern side of the A271. This would result in a visual change which would alter the character to an extent but would not be unacceptable in visual terms. There would also be wider benefits to improving connectivity which is currently poor to the east into Lower Horsebridge and Hailsham beyond to facilitate active travel by NMUs.

The various sport pitches and courts proposed would be enclosed by fencing which would not be readily discernible from outside of the site due to their location and design. Final details of this would be controlled by condition. Lighting columns would have a slim profile and be of an acceptable height. Considerable efforts have been made to reduce the level of light spill to avoid, when in use, potentially the greatest source of visual impact during the evenings and winter months on the wider landscape. The lux levels being contained within the site as confirmed by the accompanying revised lighting strategy which has significantly reduced light spill, containing this within the site itself only. This has been achieved through careful design, incorporating hooded and directional lighting which will prevent spill into the adjoining properties and trees around the site boundaries.

The facilities would be anchored by a single building on the site which would take the form of two distinct elements connected by a low level link. The southern element of the building would include a flexible space for a community café and meeting room with the associated kitchen, office, and reception area. The northern portion of the building would provide 4 sets of changing rooms with ancillary storage, officials changing and plant room. This approach reduces the bulk and massing between the two elements which themselves utilise a dual pitched roof form to reduce their overall height and enables them to have their own identity as outlined earlier in the report with the illustrative imagery. The design is of a high quality with the utilisation of dark timber cladding, warm

brick, Wealden stone, bronze metal cladding and dark metal glazing for doors and windows. The resultant building would have all the hallmarks of award winning architecture and sit comfortably within the wider landscaped site.

The resulting development would not coalesce with Hailsham, acknowledging the site is on the furthest extent of the LCA 3A which to the east gives way to the urban area of town of Hailsham. The development is softened through careful consideration of the landscape buffer around the development of the site with all its necessary infrastructure including car parking which would take into account the key objectives and guidance contained within the Landscape Character Assessment, elements of which are addressed in the relevant sections of the report which follow, including historic landscape, biodiversity and flood risk and water management.

Consideration of Statement of Heritage Significance

No designated heritage assets exist on the site itself. The majority of the assets identified in the submitted Heritage Statement are clearly not within the immediate setting of the site. Their distance, physical separation through intervening features such as the A267 and A271. Therefore, it is agreed, only Brook House, which lies to the south and west of the site by approximately 90m and 15m respectively. This Grade II listed building would be affected by the proposal.

Having discussed the proposal with the Council's Senior Heritage Officer, they are of the same view. There would be some less than substantial harm to the setting of Brook House, which is grade II listed. The building is located to the south and west of the application site. Historically the land around the property from when it first appeared on historic maps, to its listing (August 1981) and the present day has included an increase in the land which falls within its ownership. However, it has never been associated with the land to which the application relates. Although it is noted the application site, once divided into 4 principle fields, it has lost its historic field boundaries.

The significance of Brook House arises from its principal elevation facing the A271. This is the most noteworthy of its elevations with planning history confirming it has been subject to past extension to the rear and north-east side. A garage has also been erected within the garden to the south west of the dwelling. The site is bounded by hedging. The most notable views of the asset are from the A271 which allow an appreciation of significance of the asset. This is derived from its architectural merits. Although noting that in terms of its evidential value, it was built in the 1830s, so this value is relatively limited and considered to be low.

Turning to its historic value, the building is one which is afforded limited significance as it is of low importance in a similar vein to the above conclusion. The building is a modest early Victorian detached dwelling, it has no links to known historical events, movements, groups or individuals. Its low value is afforded and derived from its general age and association with the period along the A271, which linked Lower Horsebridge and Lower Dicker.