

Gravesham Borough Council

FAO: E Bonthron Esq.
By email

13th February 2024

Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

Application Ref: 20240013

Site: Former St Josephs Convent Preparatory School 46 Old Road East Gravesend Kent DA12 1NR

Proposal: Conversion of existing Victorian building into 6 flats. Demolition of existing outbuildings. Erection of a 3 storey medical centre. Erection of a building containing 7no flats. Erection of 41no houses. Associated works to include; access, public open space and landscaping.

Sport England Reference: PA/24/SE/GR/66838

Dear Ethan,

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Sport England – Statutory consultee role and policy

We understand that you have consulted us as a statutory consultee in line with the above Order. Therefore, we have considered the application in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular paragraph 103, and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy, which is presented within our 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document':

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, or
- land which has been used as a playing field land remains undeveloped, or
- land allocated for use as a playing field

unless, in the judgement of Sport England the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions. A summary of the exceptions is provided in the annex to this response.

The Proposal and its Impact on the playing field

The proposal is for flats and a medical centre which will remove the playing field completely.

Pre-application

The applicants refer to the pre-application advice they sought from Sport England in September 2023. In our response we point out there would be a loss of approximately 1.04 hectares of playing field.

We did question the methodology they used to carry out the playing pitch assessment and advised them to follow our methodology for this work, which is referenced by the Department of Levelling up Housing and Communities in their Planning Practice Guidance.

We agreed that the existing Gravesham Playing Pitch Strategy was out of date and unless there was a robust assessment, we would not be able to agree that the loss of the playing field meets our E1 planning policy exception. However, they could seek to replace the 1.04 hectares of playing field which may meet our E4 planning policy exception and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

The applicants have submitted a document entitled *Playing Fields Review October 2023*, in support of the application for the proposed development.

The review did not engage with Sport England or with any of the key National governing bodies of sport: The England and Wales Cricket Board, the Rugby Football Union, the Football Association/Football Foundation and England Hockey. This is set out in paragraph 4 in the *Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance*, which is the methodology mentioned above.

The applicants have not taken into account changes in rugby, football and cricket where there has been an increase in participation in the girls and women's games. This is taken into account in through playing pitch calculator which was introduced in 2019 and creates more robust team generation rates, which are essential for understanding the demand and supply for sport.

It is not clear if the applicants have carried out a quality audit of the sites identified in the 2016 playing pitch strategy, or checked the same teams are playing the same sites or if the teams which were identified in the original assessment have had any growth in the last 8 years or have folded. And if there have been any new clubs or teams which have formed since the assessment was completed. These are critical in producing a robust assessment.

Finally, Sport England's policy to protect playing fields covers the entire playing field site and not just the areas currently marked out with a pitch. This is because playing field is seen as a resource for pitches to be marked out on, pitches to be changed from one pitch sport type to another, or to allow areas of the playing field to rest from over play. It also allows the potential for non-pitch sports such as athletics to be marked out. If it had been Government's intention that planning policy should protect just pitches and not playing field, then The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order could have been readily drafted in that manner to make it specifically clear.

Showing surplus for one pitch sport type does not conclude that a playing field is surplus to all pitch sports, as it could be marked out for other pitch sports to meet demand for those sports. The applicant has only considered a limited number of sports and not all pitch sports and athletes that could be accommodated on the playing field.

Sport England does not accept the conclusion of the applicants' Playing Fields Review as they have not used the correct methodology properly and have not proven the case that the playing fields which are to be lost are surplus to requirements.

Sport England's Position

Given the above, Sport England raises a statutory objection to the application because it is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions to our Playing Fields Policy or paragraph 103 of the NPPF.

Potential to overcome the statutory objection

Our objection would be overcome if the applicants were to provide clear evidence by submitting a robust assessment that the land is no longer required for sport for both current and future sporting demand. Such an assessment would need to consider all pitch sports and athletes that could be accommodated on the playing field and not just the sports that have last been played or have historically been played on the site.

Alternatively, the applicant could seek to replace the land which is to be lost elsewhere in the locality both in terms of quantity and quality.

Should the local planning authority be minded to approve this application then given Sport England's objection the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021 requires the application to be referred to the Secretary of State via the National Planning Casework Unit.

If this application is to be presented to a Planning Committee, we would like to be notified in advance of the publication of any committee agenda(s), report(s) and committee date(s). Please notify Sport England of the outcome of the planning application.

If you would like any further information or advice, please contact the undersigned

Yours sincerely,

Bob

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Annex

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy

Exception 1

A robust and up-to-date assessment has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment, which will remain the case should the development be permitted, and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.

Exception 2

The proposed development is for ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field, and does not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or otherwise adversely affect their use.

Exception 3

The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:

- reduce the size of any playing pitch;
- result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);
- reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;
- result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site; or
- prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.

Exception 4

The area of playing field to be lost as a result of the proposed development will be replaced, prior to the commencement of development, by a new area of playing field:

- of equivalent or better quality, and
- of equivalent or greater quantity, and
- in a suitable location, and
- subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements.

Exception 5

The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.

The full 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at:
www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy