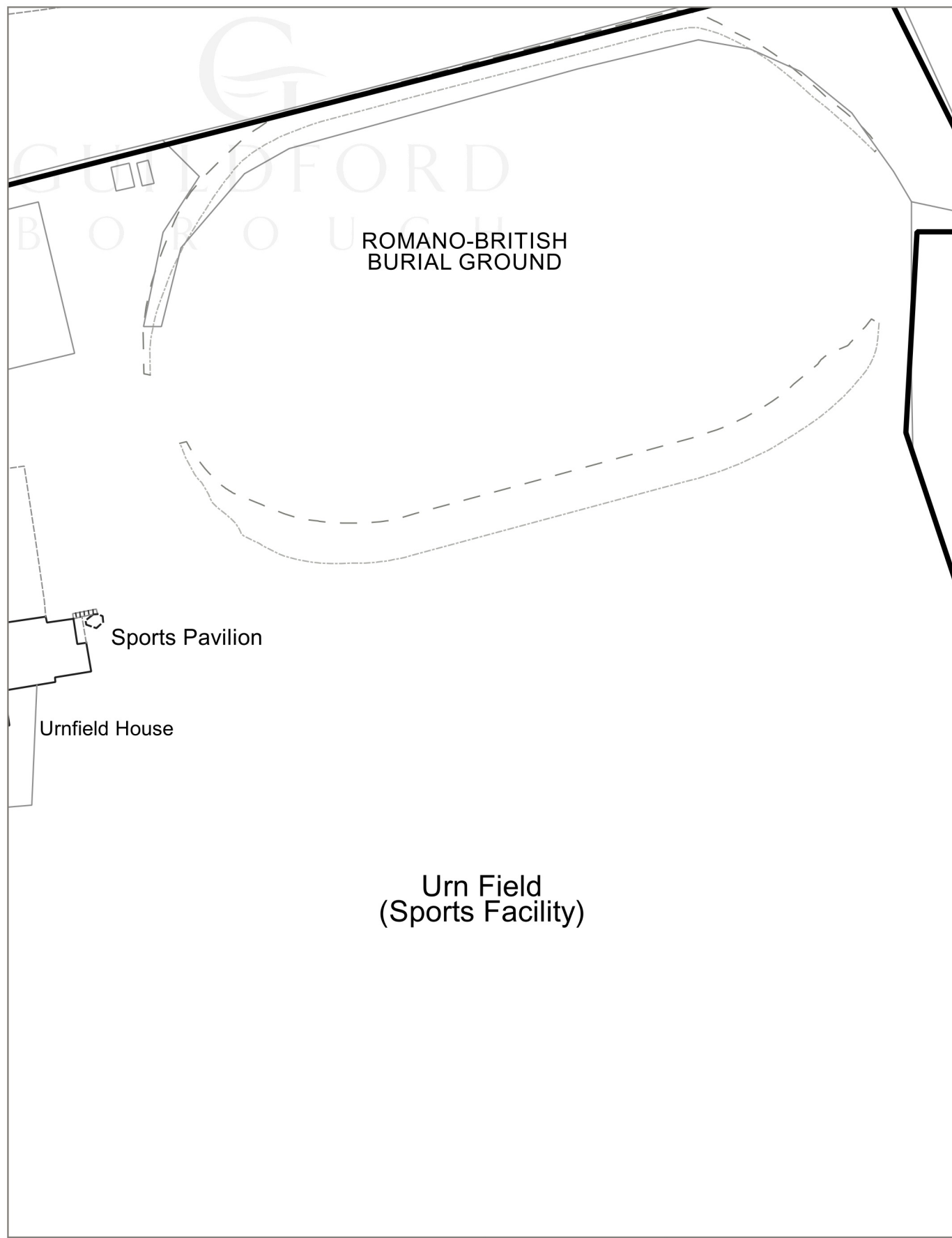


20/P/00825 - Urn Field, Downside Road



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Print Date: 17/11/2021



Not to Scale



GUILDFORD
BOROUGH

20/P/00825 Urn Field,Downside Road, Guildford.



Not to scale



App No: 20/P/00825
Appn Type: Full Application
Case Officer: Paul Sherman
Parish: Holy Trinity
Agent : Mr Matt Hill
Maddox Planning
68 Hanbury Street
London
E1 5JL

8 Wk Deadline: 17/08/2020

Ward: Holy Trinity
Applicant: Mr Dylan Kerai
Second Home Spitalfields
68 Hanbury Street
London
E1 5JL

Location: Urn Field, Downside Road, Guildford
Proposal: Full planning application for the creation of a floodlit artificial hockey pitch with a 6-lane all weather running track, a football pitch, relocation of cricket nets, extension to sports pavilion balcony and new javelin, discuss, shot put and long jump area alongside the creation of a new store building and additional on-site car parking. (Additional information received 04.01.21 & 07.01.21 landscape visual impact, archaeology, drainage and planning statement addendum).

Executive Summary

Reason for referral

This application has been referred to the Planning Committee because more the application is a major application and more than 20 letters of objection have been received, contrary to the Officer's recommendation.

Key information

The application involves the development of the existing recreation ground to provide improved facilities for schools and community use. As part of the development the following facilities would be provided:

- New all weather 400m 6 lane track, including a 110m linear track.
- New all weather hockey pitch with 1.8m high perimeter fencing and lighting
- Spectator viewing area
- High jump, long jump, discus, javelin and shotput facilities.
- Relocated rugby pitch to existing dimensions
- New artificial cricket wicket
- Retention of existing firsts cricket pitch
- 1 x new/upgraded relocated first team football pitch
- Retention of 1 x existing football pitch
- Relocation of existing cricket nets
- New sports equipment store
- Extension of existing hardstanding to parking area to allow parking for coaches, as required for school use
- Provision of a new turning head and access road to the existing hardstanding, where parking is to be rationalised and formalised. Small extension to existing hardstanding, to increase parking provision.
- New cycle parking
- Extension to existing balcony on the sports pavilion.

The site has the following designations:

- Green Belt
- Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Area of Great Landscape Value
- Area of High Archaeological Importance

Summary of considerations and constraints

The proposal represents an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

For the purposes of development within an AONB the proposals are NOT considered to represent a major development. Harm is identified to the special landscape character of the Surrey Hills AONB and the AGLV, following amendments to the application the level of harm is considered to be moderate. In line with the NPPF great weight is afforded to this harm.

No other harm from the development is identified.

There are benefits from the development, notably the provision of new school facilities which must carry great weight in any assessment and further benefits to healthy lifestyles from the associated community use that will be facilitated by the development.

Therefore following the balancing exercise set out in the report the application is recommended for approval subject to conditions. The conditions include matters relating to highways; use of the floodlights; ecological survey requirements; archaeology; drainage and community use agreements for the site.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve - subject to the following condition(s) and reason(s) :-

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
1908_001; 1908_030; 1908_008; 06; 1908_025; 1908_026; 1908_040; 09 003 REV A; 198_004 REV B; 1908_007 REV A; 1908_002 REV E

Reason: To ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans and in the interests of proper planning.

3. No development shall commence until a Construction Transport Management Plan, to include details of:

- (a) parking for vehicles of site personnel, operatives and visitors
- (b) loading and unloading of plant and materials

- (c) storage of plant and materials
- (d) measures to prevent the deposit of materials on the highway
- (e) before and after construction condition surveys of the highway on Downside Road and a commitment to fund the repair of any damage caused has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- (f) a specific plan for HGV movements to and from the site, including site layout to segregate areas for pupils and other site users from HGV traffic, times of movements (including any times where HGV movements shall not take place) and ensuring contractors do not permit any HGVs associated with the development at the site to be laid up, waiting, in Downside Avenue during these times.

Reason: In order that the development does not prejudice highway safety nor inconvenience other highway users. This condition is required to be a pre-commencement condition to ensure that the measures above have been carefully considered at an appropriate time.

4. The development hereby permitted shall not be occupied unless and until an updated travel plan has been submitted for the written approval of the Local Planning Authority. The submitted details shall include details of measures to promote sustainable modes of transport and provisions for the maintenance, monitoring and review of the impact of the Plan and its further development.

Reason: In order that the development does not prejudice highway safety nor inconvenience other highway users.

5. The proposed vehicular access to Downside Road shall be constructed in accordance with the approved plans, Drawing No.1908 040, and thereafter shall be permanently maintained.

Reason: In order that the development does not prejudice highway safety.

6. Space shall be laid out within the site in accordance with the approved plans, Drawing No. 1908_SK03, for vehicles to be parked and for vehicles to turn so that they may enter and leave the site in forward gear. Thereafter the parking and turning areas shall be retained and maintained for their designated purposes.

Reason: In order that the development does not prejudice highway safety.

7. Spaces shall be laid out within the site in accordance with the approved plan, Drawing No. 1908_SK03, for the facilities secure parking of bicycles within the development site. Thereafter, the parking for bicycles shall be retained and maintained for their designated purposes.

Reason: In order that the development provides an appropriate level of cycle parking

8. The development should be carried out in strict accordance with the submitted Edward Pearce lighting report dated September 2021 and shall not be altered without the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority. The floodlighting shall be installed, maintained and operated in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the floodlights do not result in any material harm to neighbouring residents and to limit the impact on the Surrey Hills AONB.

9. The floodlights serving the hockey pitch shall only operate between the hours of 07:30 to 20:00 Mondays to Saturdays (inclusive) and shall not operate at all on Sundays or Bank or National Holidays. Furthermore, when not in operation the floodlights shall be fully retracted.

Reason: To safeguard the residential amenities of neighbouring properties and the impact on the Surrey Hills AONB.

10. The development shall be carried out in strict accordance with the Dryad Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement Ref No: D2670.AIA.AMS. No equipment, machinery or materials shall be brought onto the site for the purposes of the development until fencing has been erected in accordance with the Tree Protection Plan. Within any area fenced in accordance with this condition, nothing shall be stored, placed or disposed of above or below ground, the ground level shall not be altered, no excavations shall be made, nor shall any fires be lit, without the prior written consent of the local planning authority. The fencing shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details, until all equipment, machinery and surplus materials have been moved from the site.

Reason: To protect the trees on site which are to be retained in the interests of the visual amenities of the locality.

11. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures and enhancements sections detailed in the submitted Greengage Bat Survey Report.

Reason: To mitigate against the impact of bats and to increase the biodiversity on the site.

12. The facilities hereby approved shall not be first used until the sustainable drainage scheme for the site has been completed in accordance with the submitted details in Pitman Associates Report Project number 0436 and shall be maintained in accordance with the details contained within the report.

Reason: To prevent an increased risk of flooding and to prevent pollution of the water environment.

13. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the Discussion and Recommendations and the Enhancements and Recommendations sections within the Greengage Preliminary Ecological

Appraisal dated December 2019; Bat Survey Report December 2019 and Badger Survey Report dated January 2020.

Reason: To mitigate against the loss of existing biodiversity and nature habitats.

14. Prior to the commencement of any development a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP shall include:
- a) description and evaluation of features to be managed;
 - b) ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management;
 - c) aims and objectives of management;
 - d) appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives;
 - e) prescriptions for management actions, together with a plan of management compartments;
 - f) preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period);
 - g) details of the body or organisation responsible for implementation of the plan;
 - h) ongoing monitoring and remedial measures.

The LEMP shall also include details of the legal and funding mechanism(s) by which the long term Implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer with the management body(ies) responsible for its delivery. The plan shall also set out (where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met) how contingencies and/or remedial action will be identified, agreed and implemented so that the development still delivers the fully functioning biodiversity objectives of the originally approved scheme. The approved plan will be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development has an acceptable ecological impact on secure biodiversity improvements

15. Prior to the commencement of development a Sensitive Lighting Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This shall include details of ensuring low levels of lighting close to woodland edges and setting out periods when no external lighting would be in use to protect bat roosts. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure protected species are not adversely affected by the proposed development.

16. Prior to commencement of development, precise details of a hard and soft landscape scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority, which shall include details relating to:-
- a) Proposed earthworks, showing existing and proposed finished levels or contours;

- b) The proposed tree and hedgerow / shrub planting including their species, numbers, sizes (age and form) and positions, together with grass seeded/turfed areas and written specifications (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment i.e., depth of topsoil, mulch etc);
- c) The existing trees and hedgerows to be retained as well as those to be felled;
- d) The hard landscaping, including hard surface areas for vehicles, surface treatment of the proposed all weather pitch, means of enclosure/boundary treatments and proposed lighting structures.

The approved scheme shall be implemented by the end of the first planting season following completion of the proposed development and shall thereafter be maintained. Any trees and/or shrubs which within a period of five 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, unless the local planning authority gives written consent for any variation.

Reason: To ensure the development has an acceptable landscaped finish.

17. The approved scheme shall be implemented by the end of the first planting season following completion of the proposed development and shall thereafter be maintained. Any trees and/or shrubs which within a period of five 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, unless the local planning authority gives written consent for any variation.

Reason: To ensure the development has an acceptable landscaped finish.

18. Before the development is first brought into use a schedule of landscape maintenance for a period of 10 years shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The schedule shall include details of the arrangements for its implementation. Maintenance shall be carried out in accordance with the approved schedule.

Reason: To ensure the long term landscape maintenance.

19. Prior to the commencement of development a written scheme of investigation for a programme of detailed archaeological monitoring shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that any archaeological evidence discovered during ground works is adequately recorded.

20. The development hereby permitted shall not commence until details of the design of a surface water drainage scheme have been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority. The design must satisfy the SuDS Hierarchy and be compliant with the national Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS, NPPF and Ministerial Statement on SuDS. The required drainage details shall include:

a) Evidence that the proposed final solution will effectively manage the 1 in 30 & 1 in 100 (+40% allowance for climate change) storm events, during all stages of the development. The final solution should follow the principles set out in the approved drainage strategy. Associated storage volumes shall be provided using an infiltration-based strategy.

b) Detailed drainage design drawings and calculations to include: a finalised drainage layout detailing the location of drainage elements, pipe diameters, levels, and long and cross sections of each element including details of any flow restrictions and maintenance/risk reducing features (silt traps, inspection chambers etc.).

c) A plan showing exceedance flows (i.e. during rainfall greater than design events or during blockage) and how property on and off site will be protected.

d) Details of drainage management responsibilities and maintenance regimes for the drainage system.

e) Details of how the drainage system will be protected during construction and how runoff (including any pollutants) from the development site will be managed before the drainage system is operational.

Reason: To ensure the design meets the national Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS and the final drainage design does not increase flood risk on or off site.

21. Prior to the first occupation of the development, a verification report carried out by a qualified drainage engineer must be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. This must demonstrate that the drainage system has been constructed as per the agreed scheme (or detail any minor variations), provide the details of any management company and state the national grid reference of any key drainage elements (surface water attenuation devices/areas, flow restriction devices and outfalls).

Reason: To ensure the Drainage System is constructed to the National Non-Statutory Technical Standards for SuDS.

22. Use of the development shall not commence until a community use agreement prepared in consultation with Sport England has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and a copy of the completed approved agreement has been provided to the Local Planning Authority. The agreement shall include details of pricing policy, hours of use, access by non-educational establishment users, management responsibilities and a mechanism for review, and anything else which the Local Planning Authority in consultation with Sport England considers necessary in order to secure the effective community use of the facilities.

The development shall not be used at any time other than in strict compliance with the approved agreement.

Reason: To secure well managed safe community access to the sports facility/facilities, to ensure sufficient benefit to the development of sport.

Informatives:

1. This statement is provided in accordance with Article 35(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Guildford Borough Council seek to take a positive and proactive approach to development proposals. We work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner by:
 - Offering a pre application advice service
 - Where pre-application advice has been sought and that advice has been followed we will advise applicants/agents of any further issues arising during the course of the application
 - Where possible officers will seek minor amendments to overcome issues identified at an early stage in the application process

However, Guildford Borough Council will generally not engage in unnecessary negotiation for fundamentally unacceptable proposals or where significant changes to an application is required.

In this case pre-application advice was sought and provided which addressed initial issues, the application has been submitted in accordance with that advice, however, further issues were identified during the consultation stage of the application. Officers have worked with the applicant to overcome these issues.

2. The permission hereby granted shall not be construed as authority to carry out any works on the highway. The applicant is advised that prior approval must be obtained from the Highway Authority before any works are carried out on any footway, footpath, carriageway, or verge to form a vehicle crossover or to install dropped kerbs. Please see www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/road-permits-and-licences/vehicle-cross-overs-or-dropped-kerbs

The developer is reminded that it is an offence to allow materials to be carried from the site and deposited on or damage the highway from uncleaned wheels or badly loaded vehicles. The Highway Authority will seek, wherever possible, to recover any expenses incurred in clearing, cleaning or repairing highway surfaces and prosecutes persistent offenders. (Highways Act 1980 Sections 131, 148, 149).

The permission hereby granted shall not be construed as authority to carry out any works on the highway or any works that may affect a drainage channel/culvert or water course.

The applicant is advised that a permit and, potentially, a Section 278 agreement must be obtained from the Highway Authority before any works are carried out on any footway, footpath, carriageway, verge or other land forming part of the highway. All works on the highway will require a permit and an application will need to be submitted to the County Council's Street Works Team up to 3 months in advance of the intended start date, depending on the scale of the works proposed and the classification of the road. Please see <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/road-permits-and-licences/the-traffic-management-permit-scheme>.

The applicant is also advised that Consent may be required under Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991.

Please see

www.surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/emergency-planning-and-community-safety/floodingadvice

The developer is advised that as part of the detailed design of the highway works required by the above condition(s), the County Highway Authority may require necessary accommodation works to street lights, road signs, road markings, highway drainage, surface covers, street trees, highway verges, highway surfaces, surface edge restraints and any other street furniture/equipment.

3. The applicant should note that under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, it is an offence to disturb nesting birds or roosting bats which are also European Protected Species. You should note that the work hereby granted consent does not override the statutory protection afforded to these species and you are advised to seek expert advice if you suspect that the demolition would disturb any protected species. Please note that a European Protected Species Licence will be required to allow the proposed development to proceed lawfully. Contact Natural England for further details: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/species/europeanprotectedspecies.aspx>
4. If proposed site works affect an Ordinary Watercourse, Surrey County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority should be contacted to obtain prior written Consent. More details are available on our website.

If proposed works result in infiltration of surface water to ground within a Source Protection Zone the Environment Agency will require proof of surface water treatment to achieve water quality standards.

Officer's Report

Site description

The site is located in the Green Belt, within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), and an Area of High Archaeological Potential (AHAP). The site is also located in the Merrow Downs Rural Urban Fringe and Merrow and Clandon Wooded Downs landscape character areas and within the 400m to 5km Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA).

The surrounding area is predominantly residential to the west of the playing field, with Downside Road and Little Warren Close immediately adjoining the site. Merrow Downs and Guildford Golf Club lie immediately north of the site, whilst the Conroy Polo Horse Riding School lies to the south. Newlands Corner a nature reserve and beauty spot lies further to the east of the site.

The application site is situated at the eastern end of Downside Road with a gated vehicular and pedestrian access, to the east of Guildford. It is 7ha in area. The site is a sports field, with marked pitches and a number of athletic facilities available to use. The sports ground is currently used by two local schools (Tormead School and Guildford County School), as well as external sports clubs and the general public for pre-planned organised events.

The existing site comprises;

- Two storey, brick and timber clad sports pavilion.
- Car parking, including hardstanding used for temporary parking
- 400m grass running track
- Senior cricket pitch with fine turf square
- Second cricket pitch with windball cricket square (not fine turf)
- 2 x existing football pitches
- 1 x existing rugby pitch
- Practice cricket nets
- Long jump, shotput, discus and javelin.

The car park is located on the eastern side of the site, immediately after entering through the gated access. There is an overflow parking area to the north only accessible over the grass.

Proposal

The application seeks full planning application for the creation of a floodlit artificial hockey pitch and 6-lane all weather running track, a football pitch, relocation of the cricket nets, new javelin, discus, shot put areas, a new long jump pit, and the extension to sports pavilion balcony. The application also seeks consent for the erection of a new store building and additional on-site car parking.

In particular, the application includes;

- New all weather 400m 6 lane track, including a 110m linear track.
- New all weather hockey pitch with 1.8m high perimeter fencing and lighting
- Spectator viewing area
- High jump, long jump, discus, javelin and shotput facilities.
- Relocated rugby pitch to existing dimensions

- New artificial cricket wicket
- Retention of existing firsts cricket pitch
- 1 x new/upgraded relocated first team football pitch
- Retention of 1 x existing football pitch
- Relocation of existing cricket nets
- New sports equipment store
- Extension of existing hardstanding to parking area to allow parking for coaches, as required for school use
- Provision of a new turning head and access road to the existing hardstanding, where parking is to be rationalised and formalised. Small extension to existing hardstanding, to increase parking provision.
- New cycle parking
- Extension to existing balcony on the sports pavilion.

Relevant planning history

The application site has historically been used for sports pitches in association with schools in the local area however there is no planning history for this site directly relevant to the current application.

Consultations

Statutory consultees:

County Highway Authority: No objection raised with regard to highway safety, capacity or on policy grounds, subject to the imposition of conditions requiring the submission of a construction management plan and compliance with the submitted Schools Travel Plan.

Lead Local Flood Authority: No objections raised, subject to conditions.

Sports England: Sport England would like to reiterate the importance of ensuring good quality community access and use to the sports facilities and playing field as proposed. Sport England also notes that community use of the site is well-established. Our support is therefore conditional on ensuring that the proposal maintains strong, formal arrangements for community use of the site. We would not be able to support an application which includes a section 106 agreement which seeks to restrict use of the sites and the sports facilities to the school only. In this case, we would not consider our E5 exception policy is met and we would object to the application.

Internal consultees:

Head of Environmental Health and Licensing: have made the following comments:

- Floodlighting to meet Hockey England recommendations
- Noise levels similar to existing use
- Location of cricket nets
- Measures to improve air quality

Non-statutory consultees:

Natural England: no comments refer to standing advice

Surrey Wildlife Trust: has made the following comments:

- undertake mitigation and enhancement measure
- suggest a condition for a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP)
- species protection from tree/scrub removal
- floodlighting - bat activity

Surrey Hills AONB Director: has made the following comments:

- parking would be in a lower part of the site
- sight of parked vehicles would be more visually intrusive than the surfacing itself, therefore the landscaping of the car park should be considered
- coach parking would have a greater visual impact
- no AONB concern can reasonably be expressed to the proposed vehicle parking
- no AONB concern for the artificial surfacing
- major AONB concern about floodlighting as an open, elevated site, would still be a glare
- a dark area adjacent to the town - light pollution in a more concentrated and likely visually more intrusive form where it would not be expected to
- eight columns being as high 15m visible towards the hilltop location - breaking the skyline
- Use of floodlights to 20:00 would attract other sporting organisations
- balance the benefits of the floodlighting with the degree of harm it would cause to the AONB dark landscape. The AONB submission is that the AONB concern is of such weight that those benefits may not do so. (Officer note - it is for the Local Planning Authority to carry out the balancing exercise of all relevant material considerations)
- If the Planning Authority is minded to grant permission it should be on the basis that it is satisfied that the proposed floodlighting would be designed to minimise light pollution as far as possible and it use should not continue possibly beyond 7pm.

Additional comments from the AONB Director were received in respect of additional information submitted:

- Strong concern over the permanent visual impact on the AONB skyline
- concern over light pollution
- some impact of formalisation of other facilities
- comments about the balance of harm against benefits (Officer note - it is for the Local Planning Authority to carry out the balancing exercise)

Surrey County Council, Archaeological Officer: within an Area of High Archaeological (AHAP) priority due to the discovery of an extensive Romano British cremation cemetery, remains may be encountered on the site within areas where ground disturbance or landscaping is proposed and so the application should be supported by an archaeological assessment in compliance with Local Plan Policy - not submitted a desk based assessment

Surrey Police, Designing Out Crime Officer: no objection and suggests conditions to achieve Secure By Design accreditation, entrance gate system and relocation of cycle store.

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE): object and have made the following comments:

- Harm to AONB from floodlights - light pollution and visual intrusion from columns
- Increase in traffic congestion
- Noise and disturbance - HGVs and coaches

Parish Councils & Amenity Groups:

Holy Trinity Amenity Group: object and have made the following comments:

- harm to the AONB
- development no necessary
- no very special circumstances
- floodlighting and spectator seating intrusive [officer comment: no stands for seating are proposed]
- no public benefits

Merrow Residents' Association: object and have made the following comments:

- Harm to AONB from floodlights - light pollution and visual intrusion from columns
- Impact on highway safety and capacity along Downside Road

Guildford Society: object and have made the following comments:

- Increase in traffic congestion
- Harm to AONB from floodlights - light pollution and visual intrusion from columns
- No very special circumstances
- Evening use of floodlights
- No need for development - alternative facilities
- Unsustainable location

Downsedge Residents' Association: object and have made the following comments:

- Inappropriate in the Green Belt
- Harm to AONB from floodlights - light pollution and visual intrusion from columns
- Restrict hours of use - to manage traffic movements
- Wear and tear of surrounding roads [officer comment: the surrounding roads are maintained by the County Highways Authority]
- Alternative surfacing - cellular grassed paving
- Noise and disturbance
- Loss of privacy - cricket nets

Save Surrey Countryside & Save Newlands Corner: object and have made the following comments:

- Harm to the AONB
- Inappropriate in the Green Belt
- Alternative scheme preferred - develop onsite facilities
- Light pollution
- Harm to wildlife
- Noise and disturbance
- Restrict hours of use
- Harm to woodland/trees
- Not a response to climate change
- Increase in traffic congestion
- Air quality
- Lack of public consultation
- harm to archaeology

Third party comments

A total of 209 letters of representation have been received raising the following principle objections and concerns:

- harm to AONB
- harm to the Green Belt
- harm to archaeology
- harm to wildlife / biodiversity
- impact on the landscape / lack of screening
- out of character with the area
- harm to woodland/trees
- increased noise and disturbance during operation
- noise and disturbance during construction impact on surface water flood risk
- lack of sustainable design for climate change
- requires an Environmental Impact Assessment [officer comment: the proposed development does not meet the threshold EIA assessment]
- increased traffic congestion
- insufficient parking
- impact on pedestrian safety
- overdevelopment of the site
- public benefits do not outweigh harm
- alternative sites are preferred
- existing facilities are sufficient to meet need
- no identified economic benefit

There have also been 376 letters of support have been received outlining the following principle positive comments:

- needs cannot be met onsite of schools
- need for modern facilities
- supports healthy communities and child and young people's health
- meet requirements in curriculum for physical education
- access to sports not usually available at state schools
- improved security
- improve existing onsite parking
- reduced traffic congestion
- ability to participate in more sports
- reduce travelling times
- benefits a wide range of community users
- site currently underutilised
- enhanced community facility

Planning policies

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning decisions to be taken in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This introduces a presumption in favour of development that accords with the development plan, and a presumption against development that does not.

The Development Plan

The Development Plan comprises,

- Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites 2015-2034 (LPSS)
- Guildford Local Plan 2003 (LP2003)
- South East Plan 2009 (SEP)

Guildford Borough Local Plan: strategy and sites 2015-2034

Policy S1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development
Policy P1: Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Area of Great Landscape Value
Policy P2: Green Belt
Policy P4: Flooding, flood risk and groundwater protection zones
Policy D1: Place Shaping
Policy D2: Climate change, sustainable design, construction and energy
Policy D3: Historic environment
Policy ID4: Green and blue infrastructure

Guildford Borough Local Plan 2003 (as saved by CLG Direction 24 September 2007):

Policy G1: General Standards of Development
Policy G5: Design Principles
Policy NE4: Species protection
Policy NE5: Development affecting trees, hedges and woodlands
Policy NE6: Undesignated features of nature conservation interest
Policy R6: Intensification of recreational use
Policy CF4: Expansion of schools

South East Plan 2009

Policy NRM6: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

Material Considerations

While the Development Plan is the starting point for decision making, there are a number of other documents that are material considerations when exercising a planning decision. The weight to be attributed to these documents will be a matter for the decision maker but national planning policy statements should be afforded the highest level of weight, followed by locally made documents that have been adopted for decision making. Other documents should normally be afforded lesser weight but can play a significant part in decision making, especially where they have been subject to significant public consultation.

The National Planning Policy Framework

Chapter 2: Achieving sustainable development
Chapter 4: Decision-making
Chapter 6: Building a strong, competitive economy
Chapter 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
Chapter 11: Making effective use of land
Chapter 11: Achieving well-designed places

Chapter 13: Protecting Green Belt land

Chapter 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Chapter 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Chapter 16: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

National Planning Practice Guidance

Climate Change

Design: Process and tools

Green Belt

Natural Environment

Open space, sports and recreation facilities

Travel Plans, Transport Assessments and Statements

Other National Planning Guidance Documents

Policy statement - planning for schools development (August 2011)

Supplementary Planning Documents

Climate Change, Sustainable Design, Construction and Energy SPD (2020)

Planning Contributions SPD (2017)

Vehicle Parking Standards SPD(2011)

Other Planning Documents

GBC Landscape Character Assessment & Guidance

Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2020-2025

Planning considerations

The main planning considerations in this case are:

- The principal of the development
- The impact of the development on the AONB and AGLV
- The impact of the development on Heritage Assets
- Impact on the character of the area
- Impact on neighbouring amenity
- The impact of the development on highway safety, parking and sustainable transport
- Impact on protected species and biodiversity
- Impact on trees
- Impact on flood risk
- Planning balance

The principal of the development

The application site is located in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Both these policy designations seek to restrict development and it is appropriate that the principle of the development in these designated areas be considered in turn.

The principle of development in the AONB

Both Policy P1 of the LPSS and the NPPF makes clear that development within the AONB should be limited and that development within its setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the AONB. It also requires that planning decisions should ensure that they protect and enhance valued landscapes of the AONB and that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty of these areas. Policy P1 also sets out that development proposals will be assessed against the provisions of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan

The NPPF also requires that when considering applications for development within AONBs, permission should be refused for major development, other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. For the purposes of this section of the NPPF, the term 'major development', is stated to be a matter for the decision maker but it should take into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.

Whether a major development

The most commonly referred to definition of 'major development' is that which is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015. This defines 'major development' as being any proposal for the provision of a building (or buildings) where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres, or, any development being carried out on a site having with an area of 1 hectare or more. While this proposal would meet this definition of 'major development' it must be acknowledged that this is not equivalent to the considering what is a major development in terms of the application of AONB policy.

The NPPF does not provide a definition for major development in AONBs, however, footnote 55 of the NPPF is clear that consideration as to whether the proposal is a major development is a matter for the decision maker and that the nature, scale and setting of the proposed development should be taken into account, as well as whether it would cause a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined. This advice is reflected in supporting text to Policy P1 of the LPSS which states whether or not a proposal constitutes 'major development' will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account relevant factors such as the nature, scale and setting of the proposed development.

In this case, the proposal amounts to the redevelopment of an existing sports field and playing pitches which would include the provision of improved facilities associated with the existing use of the land. The site is located adjacent to the boundary with the urban area and would not conflict with the wider strategic impacts of the AONB. For all of these reasons the development is not considered to be a major application for the application of AONB policy and accordingly there is no objection to the principle of this development taking place within this part of the AONB.

Policy Statement - planning for schools development

Para 95 of the NPPF sets out that an LPA should 'give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools' The policy statement goes on to state: 'The Government is firmly committed to ensuring there is sufficient provision to meet growing demand for state-funded school places, increasing choice and opportunity in state-funded education and raising educational standards.'

State-funded schools - which include Academies and free schools, as well as local authority maintained schools (community, foundation and voluntary aided and controlled schools) - educate the vast majority of children in England. The Government wants to enable new schools to open, good schools to expand and all schools to adapt and improve their facilities.'

It goes on to state that refusals of such development will be considered unreasonable conduct unless it is supported by clear and cogent evidence.

The principle of the development in the Green Belt

Policy P2 of the LPSS and the NPPF makes clear that with the Green Belt there is a general presumption against development. Development is defined as inappropriate development unless it falls within the limited range of circumstances as set out in paragraph 149 or 150 of the NPPF. While new development in the Green Belt is generally inappropriate, exceptions include development which is for appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation.

The development proposes the redevelopment of this existing sports field to allow for a more intensive use of the site. The objective of the development is to create a better use of the facilities that currently exist on this site for the benefit of the schools that currently use the site. While the proposal includes new operational development, these facilities are, in principle, considered to be appropriate facilities for sport and recreation.

The development is therefore considered to be appropriate facilities for the purposes of sport and outdoor recreation. In such circumstances it is still necessary for the decision maker to consider whether the proposed development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and whether the development would conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The impact on the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and the impact on openness

Paragraph 138 of the NPPF sets out that the purposes of including land within the Green Belt are:

- 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.

The development seeks consent of the redevelopment of an existing sports field and would clearly not conflict with the objectives of restricting urban sprawl or preventing neighbouring towns merging. This part of the Green Belt does not assist in safeguarding the setting or special character of a historic town and it is unlikely that allowing this proposal would undermine the objective to direct development to derelict or other urban land. While the proposal would include additional physical development on the site the proposal would not amount to a significant encroachment of the urban area into the Green Belt. Accordingly, it is considered that the development would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The impact on openness of the Green Belt

The principle defining character of the Green Belt is its Openness; this is generally identified by the absence of development. The introduction of development into Green Belt is likely to be harmful to openness.

The issue of openness was considered in *Turner v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor* [2016] EWCA Civ 466 with the Court of Appeal finding that:

"The concept of "openness of the Green Belt" is not narrowly limited to the volumetric approach"...openness is open-textured and a number of factors are capable of being relevant when it comes to applying it to the particular facts of a specific case. Prominent among these will be factors relevant to how built up the Green Belt is now and how built up it would be if redevelopment occurs (in the context of which, volumetric matters may be a material concern, but are by no means the only one) and factors relevant to the visual impact on the aspect of openness which the Green Belt presents."

The existing land is open grass land and whilst the car park, new hard landscaping features, fencing and lighting, would result in an increase artificial development on the site, the large majority of the land would remain free of any development as is the existing situation. When viewed in the context of the openness of the site as it currently exists as well as the proposed development, it is concluded that the development would not materially impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

Conclusions on the principle of development

The application site is located within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is within the Green Belt. The development is not considered to be a major development for the purposes of AONB development and accordingly there is no 'in principle' objection to the development on AONB grounds. The development would also amount to an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt in that it would be a development for outdoor sport and recreation that would not impact on the openness of the Green Belt. For these reasons it is considered that the principle of the development is acceptable on both AONB and Green Belt grounds.

The impact of the development on the AONB and AGLV

The application site is located in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), both the Local Plan and the NPPF requires that great weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB and development proposals. The NPPF makes clear that these areas should benefit from the highest level of protection and that is reflected by the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan which acknowledges that the Surrey Hills AONB is one of England's finest landscapes. The intention of the AONB designation is to conserve the natural beauty of the landscape while acknowledging that the landscape is constantly evolving as a result of the social and economic forces placed upon it. The vision of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan is to ensure that change can take place in a way that conserves and enhances its special qualities.

The application site currently comprises existing grass playing pitches with a pavilion, vehicular access and car parking, located adjacent to the western boundary with Downside Road. A tarmac tennis court is located to the north-west of the site and is used as informal parking. The northern pitch is located within a sunken area on the edge of a north-facing slope.

The remainder of the site is generally level. There is currently limited floodlighting on the site associated with the existing pavilion building although the majority of the site is not illuminated in hours of darkness. The existing site is generally well screened from most publicly accessible viewpoints and views from Merrow Downs, located to the north, are screened by the existing trees which lie between the site and the common land.

The application seeks consent for the redevelopment of the existing school sports facility on the site which would include the creation of a floodlit artificial hockey pitch, a 6-lane all weather running track, a football pitch, relocation of cricket nets, extension to sports pavilion balcony and new javelin, discus, shot put and long jump area alongside the creation of a new store building and additional on-site car parking. Given that the site is located in a sensitive landscape location within the Surrey Hills AONB the application is supported by a detailed Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) which assesses the impact of the proposed development against the current baseline situation.

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The LVA has been considered by a landscape specialist who has provided details, comments and assessment along with recommendations. In brief the conclusions of this assessment is that the overall impact of the development is of medium sensitivity rather than the low sensitivity presented in the LVA. The assessment notes that the existing pitches and pavilion are well screened from publicly accessible viewpoints and that middle distance views are seen in the context of existing housing on Downside Road with Guildford beyond. It is satisfied with the baseline used in the LVA and the assessment itself accords with the professional judgements of the specialist reviewing on behalf of the Council. There is a differing view on the sensitivity of the site concluding it is of medium sensitivity rather than the low sensitivity presented in the LVA.

The assessment of the LVA concludes that there would be no longer term significant adverse landscape or visual impact from the majority of the proposals. The exception is the proposed floodlights. Nighttime effects are limited to 6 months of the year between sundown and 8pm in an urban edge location. Nevertheless there is potential for harm especially from Merrow Down. The report also considers that daytime views are important and the lighting columns themselves would have an effect in this respect.

It is noted that several changes have resulted from the original submission. Reduction in height of floodlight columns from 15 metres to 13 metres. There has also been a further change by the use of retractable floodlight columns (a specific suggestion in the report assessing the LVA). This will help minimise daytime views when the columns are not in use.

The conclusions suggest conditions around landscape mitigation; information regarding light spillage (which has been provided in a lighting report) along with restrictions on the hours of operation.

Surrey Hills AONB Officer

The Surrey Hills AONB Officer has been consulted as part of this application with two responses received during the course of the application. The main response acknowledges that this involves the development of an existing recreation ground and sporting facilities adjacent to a residential area. The AONB officer concludes that there can be no reasonable concern expressed to vehicle parking. Nor would there be a concern with the surfacing of the hockey pitch and running track.

However, there is major concern with the floodlighting. The concern with the elevated location of the site and there would be some glare visible from views out of the urban area into the AONB. The officer acknowledges the location adjacent to Guildford where there is already considerable light pollution, but this does not overcome all the concerns over the effect from the additional floodlighting and on the skyline.

The AONB officer references the AONB Management Plan (which carries significant weight under policy P1 of the Adopted Local Plan), it is acknowledged that this is not one of the darkest parts of the AONB, but its high ground and exposed location with an intensive light source proposed. Therefore policy P2 of the management plan is engaged.

The supplementary comments from the AONB officer reinforces these concerns.

Conclusions on AONB/AGLV impact

The proposals for the new football and rugby pitches to the southern end of the site would not be floodlit and involve minimal amounts of built development to support those. Therefore, these matters would have limited impact on the wider landscape and the AONB. Likewise, the formalising of the hockey pitch and running track would not cause a significant effect on the AONB. The main impact is around the new floodlighting columns and the lighting itself.

The applicant has agreed to several changes since submission, the overall height of the columns has been reduced to from 15 metres to 13 metres and the use of retractable columns has also been agreed. This would reduce the long term visual effect with the columns retracted when not in use. However, this would not remove the potential impact of the lighting itself.

It is acknowledged that the site is not in an isolated and wholly dark location within the AONB, instead it is on the urban edge with nearby residential properties, therefore views from the AONB towards the site will be viewed on that background. However, the introduction of the lighting columns would still result in an intensive light source affecting views towards the AONB and in particular of Merrow Downs. There is conflict with Policy P2 of the AONB management plan in this respect.

Information submitted alongside the application confirms that the installation of the lighting will be done to minimise light spillage and the Council's Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that the lighting intensity is limited to that required for the usage. Furthermore, hours of operation are proposed to be limited to 8pm and as such the resulting effect would be mostly limited to autumn and winter months. With these restrictions in mind the overall effect would be mitigated to a degree and would not be a permanent effect. That said it is unlikely to be possible to entirely eliminate any such effect and therefore it must be concluded that some harm would result to the special landscape character of the AONB and the AGLV and conflict with policy P1 parts 3 and 4, in line with para 176 of the NPPF Great weight should be afforded this matter.

The impact of the development on Heritage Assets

It is one of the core principles of the NPPF that heritage assets should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework addresses proposals affecting heritage assets. Para 193 sets out that 'great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'.

The NPPF sets out that the local planning authority should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset...They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Paras 195-199 set out the framework for decision making in planning applications relating to heritage assets and this application takes account of the relevant considerations in these paragraphs.

Policy D3 of the LPSS makes clear that Heritage Assets include buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes having a degree of significance because of their heritage interest within the historic environment. This includes designated Heritage assets, such as those identified through national legislation such as scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, or conservation areas. Non-designated heritage assets are those that are identified by the Local Planning Authority and this includes locally listed buildings and sites which are identified as being of high archaeological importance.

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that 'In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' The site does not include any Listed Buildings, or any designated heritage assets and these are none within close proximity of the site that are likely to be affected by the proposed development. Accordingly, the requirements of the Section 66(1) are not engaged in this application.

The application site is located within an Area of High Archaeological which was designated due to the discovery of an extensive Romano British cremation cemetery, which gives its name to the site. The application is supported by an Archaeological Assessment which includes the reports of a test pit evaluation of the site. This work provides significant information which helps inform the potential impact that the proposed development.

The County Archaeological Officer has reviewed the proposals and the Archaeological Assessment provided and has concluded that while the work does not amount to a comprehensive archaeological evaluation of the site it provides sufficient information to allow an informed decision to be made regarding the nature and scale of further archaeological mitigation works. Accordingly, they have raised no objection to the development subject to a planning condition to secure a suitable methodology for the work which would be set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation.

Accordingly, it is concluded that the development would have no adverse impact on either designated or non-designated heritage assets. For this reason, the development is considered to comply with the objectives of Policy D3 of the Local Plan and the guidance set out in the NPPF in respect of heritage assets.

Impact on the character of the area

In addition to considering the impact on the wider landscape and the AONB it is necessary to consider the impact of the development on the character of the local area. Policy D1 of the Local Plan requires a high quality design approach and that development should reflect distinct local character

The development proposed seeks to improve facilities at a site that is currently used for sport and recreation. Other than the impact on the AONB, discussed above, the development would only have a potential impact on the character and appearance of Downside Road and Little Warren Close. Both these roads currently terminate at the boundary with the existing sports ground which also marks the edge of the current urban area.

The proposed development seeks to redevelop the existing sports ground to provide improved facilities, primarily for the use of the schools who currently use the site. While the proposed development would include additional built facilities, artificial surfaces and floodlighting, this would not materially change the character of either street in that a sports ground is located at the terminus of the street. As is discussed elsewhere in this report the hours of use of the ground and the floodlights will be controlled by condition and therefore the site will have limited use in hours of darkness when the effects of floodlighting would be most significant. The built facilities, parking areas and other operational development would have a very limited impact on the character and appearance of Downside Road and Little Warren Close.

For these reasons the development is considered to comply with the requirements of Policy D1 of the Local Plan and the objectives of chapter 12 of the NPPF.

The impact on neighbouring amenity

The application site is located at the western end of Downside Road, with the nearest neighbouring dwellings to the proposed development are those at the western end of Downside Road and Little Warren Close. In total, 4 residential properties share a common boundary with the application site. While there are many other residential properties in the local area, these properties are those most likely to be impacted by the proposed development.

The development proposed does not include a change of use of the land but seeks operational development which is likely to result in the land being more intensively used. The existing site comprises a sports ground that is currently used by the two schools who are seeking to use the improved facilities. This is a significant factor as there is already activity taking place at the site of a similar nature to that proposed.

Whilst more effective use of the site might increase some noise associated with the activities it is important to note that these would nevertheless remain recreational in nature primarily involving school activities with other community users also likely. The timeframes for use are likely to be focussed during the day time, although other users are likely in the evening this is unlikely to result in undue disturbance. Only the floodlight pitch can be used in hours of darkness and those times will be limited by condition for the operation of the floodlights.

Concern has been expressed at the impact of the floodlighting. The Council's Environmental Health Officer has not objected to the proposal and technical information has been submitted to demonstrate that light spillage will be limited. It is important to note that the effect on amenity is different to that of landscape character assessed as part of the AONB effect. In this case the restrictions on light spillage and hours of use will be sufficient to ensure that the effect on amenity would not be harmful.

Car parking is proposed to be accommodated on site, therefore although there will be some comings and goings this would not be to a degree to harm the amenities of occupiers.

Overall it is considered that the development would not be harmful to residential amenity and therefore accords with policy G1(3) of the 2003 local plan,

The impact of the development on highway safety, parking and sustainable transport

The application site is located at the eastern end of Downside Road which gives access to the application site. Downside Road is a residential street which includes areas of parked cars in controlled bays on both sides of the road. While the site is not located within the centre of the urban area, it adjoins the urban area and is not in an area which is inherently unsustainable from a transport perspective. Additionally the site is currently in use for recreational purposes and therefore does not propose the introduction of an entirely new use.

The application site is currently used by the same schools who would be the primary users of the new facility. While the development would improve the facilities on this site, primarily in terms of the quality of the provision, it is not expected that the proposed development would result in a significant increase in the number of people who may be expected to use the site at any one time.

Parking provision is proposed to be provided which the applicant states will accommodate the demand from the uses, this includes a significant level of car parking and space for mini-bus and coach parking.

Surrey County Council as the highway authority has not objected to the application and suggested conditions, which includes the provision of an updated travel plan which the applicant has agreed to.

Overall it is therefore considered that there are no objections to the development in these respects.

Impact on protected species and biodiversity

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was submitted with the application and found that the site had potential to provide habitat for bats, nesting birds and hedgehogs. To avoid impact on nesting birds and hedgehogs the report details mitigation measures such as works being carried out outside of bird nesting season and to carry out hand searches and phased clearance of shrubs and dense vegetation with compensation through species-rich, wildlife friendly landscaping. A condition is therefore recommended to ensure the works on site are carried out in accordance with the mitigation measures and the enhancements to the site outlined with the report.

Following the findings of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, a Bat Survey Report was submitted and confirms the presence of roosting bats in the eastern elevation of the sports hall. It goes on to state that due to the proposed increased artificial lighting, the light spill would result in direct and indirect disturbance to bats and / or their resting place and that without mitigation the proposals would disturb and modify the characteristics of the existing roosts. The report goes on to say that the external construction works would not result in any direct or indirect disturbance. A sensitive lighting strategy is suggested to mitigate effects on bats.

Surrey Wildlife Trust has been consulted as part of the application process with further comments provided by the applicant. The latest comments suggest the provision of a detailed Landscape and Ecological Management Plan which should also address biodiversity compliance and also suggests the requirement of a sensitive lighting plan as suggested by the application. These

matters will be required by condition.

Conditions are also recommended to ensure the development proceeds in accordance with the ecological survey undertaken.

Subject to these matters officers are satisfied that the development is appropriate in these regards.

Impact on trees

The application site currently comprises sports fields and as such is generally clear of trees and significant landscape features. There are however a number of groups of established trees, principally located on the boundaries of the site.

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Report and Method Statement which identifies the trees that would potentially be impacted by the development and the measures necessary to mitigate the impact of the development on these trees. The report also confirms that two tree groups would need to be partially removed along with some minor pruning of trees to be retained to facilitate the development. The remainder of the trees on the site, and those on the site boundaries, would be retained with measures identified in the report for their protection during the construction process. The trees to be removed are of relatively low quality (Grade C) and are those bounding the northern boundary of the sites and those bounding the existing running track. Even with the works proposed these groups will in the large part be retained and the Councils Arboricultural Officer has raised no objection to the development. The have recommended that conditions be attached to any development to secure compliance with the Arboricultural Impact Report and Method Statement submitted.

Accordingly it is considered that, subject to suitable planning conditions, the proposed development would have minimal impact on the trees on site. For these reasons the development is considered to comply with the relevant objectives of Policy ID4 of the Local Plan.

Impact on flood risk

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 as identified by the Environment Agency which is identified as having a low risk of flooding. The application seeks the redevelopment of the existing sports pitches and does not introduce any new land uses to the site; accordingly the development would not result in the creation of a more vulnerable use on the site.

A Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy has been submitted with the application and confirms that the site is at risk of flooding from surface water runoff and groundwater flooding at surface level. The report concludes that any surface water flooding caused by short duration-high intensity rainfall events would only be likely to result in flooding at the site for short periods time and that safe egress could be maintained during these heavy rainfall events. The development proposed would not increase the risk of surface water flooding or the risk to people using the site where flooding to occur.

The proposed drainage strategy for the site would ensure that off-site discharge is limited as close as practicable to greenfield rates by means of infiltration or the use of an attenuation tank as necessary. The Lead Local Flood Authority has reviewed the Surface Water Drainage Strategy and has raised no objection to the development subject to conditions.

Accordingly it is considered that the development would not result in an increase risk of flooding on the site and would not give rise to an increase to the risk of flooding at adjoining properties. For these reasons the development is considered to comply with the objectives of Policy ID4 of the Local Plan and relevant guidance set out in the NPPF.

Planning Balance

Planning decisions are to be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The proposal would be contrary to Policy P1 of the LPSS in that it fails to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. Given that the proposal conflicts with the development plan, there is no presumption in favour of the development. Accordingly, it is necessary to balance the benefits of the proposal against the harm caused and the conflict with the development plan.

Planning Harm

The proposed development would fail to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and AGLV. While the applicant has made reasonable steps to limit the impact on the AONB, such as introducing retractable lighting, there would remain moderate harm to the special landscape character of the AONB/AGLV. The harm is reduced from that originally proposed and conditions limiting hours of use of the floodlighting provides additional mitigation. Nevertheless the NPPF requires that great weight is given to the protection of these nationally important landscapes and as such this harm should be given considerable weight in the determination of this planning application.

Planning Benefits

While the applicant does not agree that the proposal would result in harm to the AONB they have set out a number of benefits which they consider should be considered as weighing in support of the proposed development. While they also point out that the proposal does not seek to provide a significant uplift in facilities on site but seeks to reasonably enhance the existing facilities, they consider the following matters should be seen as benefits of the scheme:

- The opportunity to enhance an existing school facility site, for the benefit of local schools
- Enhanced sport recreation and facilities for potential use by the local community
- Provide greater opportunities for children to become involved in outdoor sport and live healthier lifestyles
- Provide improved car parking areas on site and reduce existing impacts on Downside Road
- Assist in contributing to the objectives to create, expand or alter schools.

The development proposed would undoubtedly deliver benefits in terms of the matters set out above. These would include benefits to the schools, who would primarily use the facilities, but also to the wider public.

Chapter 8 of the NPPF makes clear that planning decision should support development which enables and supports healthy lifestyles, including those which seek to provide new sports facilities and that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools.

The Planning Policy Statement - Planning for Schools Development (August 2011) sets out the Government's commitment to supporting the development of state-funded schools and their delivery through the planning system. This statement applies to both the change of use of land and operational development necessary to the operational needs of schools. This national policy document is a significant material consideration which must be taken into account in any planning decision relating to state-funded schools.

The Planning for Schools Development Policy Statement requires that there should be a presumption in favour of the development of state-funded schools and that local authorities should give weight to the importance of enabling the development of state-funded schools in their planning decisions. It also makes clear that it is the Government's view that the development of state-funded schools is strongly in the national interest and that planning decisions should support that objective.

The proposed development would provide improved sporting facilities for a state funded school, and would also be used by an independent school, as well as members of the public. There is a clear support from national planning policy and guidance that development for schools should be supported and that this must be afforded considerable weight in making planning decisions in line with national material considerations.

The applicant has clearly demonstrated that the proposed development would be of significant benefit to the schools who would use the facility and this benefit should be afforded considerable weight. While the hours of use of the facility are to be limited by condition, as discussed above, the development would also have the potential to be used by other groups, visiting schools and the general public and all of these would support the NPPF's objective to improve access to sporting facilities and to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population. This is a further benefit from the scheme which should also be afforded significant weight.

Planning Balance

While the harm to the AONB/AGLV is considered to be moderate and it is acknowledged that the applicant has amended the proposals and agreed to conditions to limit the impacts, it must still be afforded considerable weight and importance in any planning balance. Weighed against this is the need to support the development of schools and the need to provide enhanced sport and recreation facilities in the interests of supporting healthy lifestyles. Having regard to all of the above, it is considered that the benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the harm that would be caused to the AONB/AGLV and accordingly the development should be supported.

Conclusion

There is no in principle objection to the proposed development which would provide improved sporting facilities at the school in line with one of the aims of the NPPF. The proposed development would not be out of character in this educational setting, and subject to compliance with conditions would not result in any adverse impact on protected species and result in some enhancements to the biodiversity value of the site. The proposal would also not result in any adverse impact on trees or have any material impact on highway / parking considerations.