

Officer Liz Anderson – Ecologist
Date 13/8/2025

Ref: 25/01830/FP
Att: Alex Howard

Highfield School , Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3QA

Creation of a 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights and an access footpath

Consultee comments;

Having read through the submitted documents there would be no ecological objection to the proposal.

The September 2024 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) advised further bat surveys which have advised a bat sensitive lighting strategy to mitigate any potential impact from introduced floodlighting.

The Statutory Metric provided with the application shows that the scheme cannot deliver the mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain on site. A BNG cover report is referred to but this appears to be limited to paragraph 4.3 which considers an area of grassland adjacent to the site. However, this is not identified on the location plan and the 'off-site' tab in the metric is missing so it's not possible to ascertain whether 10% BNG can be achieved. The applicant is advised that should an off-site solution be sought within blue land a s106 will be required to secure it. As such they may wish to amend the red line boundary?

The PEA also makes recommendation for mitigation measures to avoid impacts to ecological receptors during construction and operational phases. The following Construction Environment Management Plan – Biodiversity condition is recommended.

No development shall take place (including ground works or vegetation clearance) until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP: Biodiversity), as informed by recommendations made in the September 2024 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The CEMP (Biodiversity) shall include the following.

- a) Risk assessment of potentially damaging construction activities.*
- b) Identification of "buffer zones" both for species and sensitive habitats to be informed by up to date surveys.*
- c) Practical measures (both physical measures and sensitive working practices) to avoid or reduce impacts during construction (may be provided as a set of method statements) to include a precautionary non-licensed method statement for GCN.*
- d) The location and timing of sensitive works to harm to biodiversity features.*
- e) The times during construction when specialist ecologists need to be present on site to oversee works.*

f) Responsible persons and lines of communication.

g) The role and responsibilities on site of an ecological clerk of works (ECow) or similarly competent person.

h) Use of protective fences, exclusion barriers and warning signs.

The approved CEMP shall be adhered to and implemented throughout the construction period strictly in accordance with the approved details, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

The potential for disturbance to bats from the floodlighting on site is raised in the Phase 2 bat report with surveys recording bat species which are sensitive to artificial lighting and are categorised as of conservation significance in England, predominantly on the eastern boundary. Floodlight mitigation has been designed to avoid lighting this boundary and a lighting curfew suggested. Provided this is adhered to no ecological impact is anticipated. The following condition is advised;

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specifications and locations set out in the June 2025 Sports Lighting Statement and the Floodlighting Scheme Plan SSL3394 drawing 6. These shall be maintained thereafter and the hours of use contained within adhered to.

The case officer should note Biodiversity Gain condition wording should be added to the decision notice, the biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition having its own separate statutory basis and is deemed to apply to every planning permission granted for the development of land in England. To ensure the applicant is clear about this distinction the biodiversity gain condition should not be included in the list of conditions imposed in the written notice when granting planning permission but should remain separate.

Biodiversity Net Gain

*The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition “(the biodiversity gain condition)” that **development may not begin** unless:*

(a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and

(b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be North Herts Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because none of the statutory exemptions or transitional arrangements are considered to apply.