

43Highfield

Letchworth Garden City

SG6 3PY

22nd August 2025

Reference: Planning Application 25/01830/FP Site: Highfield School, Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3QA Proposal: Creation of a 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights and an access footpath.

Dear Sir/Madam

Whilst recording my objection to the planned all-weather football pitches for The Highfield School I would like to place on record my concerns at the quality of communication and limits on the opportunity for interested parties to comment in particular:

- No prior consultation with neighbours or, apparently, parents
- the timing of the application during summer holidays while potential objectors will be away, will not see the letter or have time to respond
- This is a special case where many more than the notified 34 people informed will be affected particularly in view of the impact on traffic.
- Late delivery of supporting reports after most comments have been delivered and many opponents will not see them
- No recognition that the application constitutes change of use from education to commercial

I have reviewed the Sport England report and quote from it in my comments. I have read and fully support the 24 objections published to date so will not reiterate details of the unsuitability of the proposed site so close to domestic gardens but I would like comment further on change of use, loss of essential green space, traffic/parking and the lack of management planning.

Change of Use - Education to Commercial

Pupil needs are minimal. Unlike cricket football takes place in almost all weather. The design statement for The Highfield School's new sports hall planning application (2008) stated " Our fields are adequate for providing the facilities we require to teach outdoor Physical Education. With the exception of extreme weather outdoor lessons are rarely disrupted" The sports hall caters for those extremes.

Planning permission to turn the grassed area next to my home into a car park was for drop off and pick up of pupils. Movements were to be parents twice per day during term time. Whilst it is now used for staff parking car movements remain educational in 2 distinct regular periods on school days term time only.

Planned community use of the all-weather pitches is 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, with activities from 8 am till late evening (nominally 8pm but Sport England suggests 10pm as a normal end time). Proposed car park use, presumably from 7.30 am, for pitch users will be 128 car movements every hour. Spectator cars will be additional. The original approval never anticipated such use. Pedestrian movement along the side of my garden and the bottom of my neighbours' and my garden will follow a similar rate.

Loss of recreation space/green belt

The sports hall was built on more than 0.3acre of the then pupil recreation area. The planning application for the hall (2008) used education as justification for inappropriate use of green belt. There is no net educational gain so no educational justification for these pitches and no other justification is given.

The application and the Sport England report recently added to Reference Documents references just one clause of the National Planning Policy Framework directions for Open Space and Recreation, NPPF (2024). Several apply.

“Existing playing fields should not be built on unless the benefits of alternative sports provision clearly outweigh the loss”. Whilst Sport England SE suggests this criterion is met pointing out that “Aerial photographs indicates that this area has not had playing pitches marked out on it in recent years” it appears to not recognise the field’s use as a general recreation area for 1000 pupils. The loss of green open play and relaxation area for the vast majority of students is major, the gain to school footballers is minor and to community users unsubstantiated.

NPPF Para 103 promotes “access to open spaces”. The application seeks to enclose around 60% of the open grassed recreation field The all-weather surface is unsuitable for more general play and relaxation and the floodlights and tall green metal fences damage a calming general ambience

Para 104 requires “Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for sport and recreation facilities”. The justification presented is inadequate. Sport England “confirmed that there is no existing community use of the playing fields” presumably those to the west of Briar Patch Lane. Although the Sport England report now indicates “emerging Playing Pitch Strategy findings has identified a need for 1 additional full size 3G AGP in Letchworth.” it specifically says the Highfield proposed pitch does not meet that need.

Para 104 requires “an assessment to show the open space to be surplus to requirements”. None is presented. It is not surplus but an essential school facility in its current form. For Highfield students the field to the west of Briar Patch Lane is available for supervised sport. The open grassed area within the safely fenced school grounds is available for all children to relax, run and play during lunch and break times. Even if the proposed all-weather area is available during breaks its use will be limited to 44 footballers constraining around 950 students to the less than 40% to the north. At times even those areas are likely to be rendered as unusable through rain run-off from the all-weather pitches during heavy storms,

Parking and road use

The application proposes car park use 365 days a year from 7:30am with, at change-over, 128 user cars every hour on the hour parking there or passing through. All will pass close to my home and down the length of my garden. This fills the full site capacity of the two car parks.. Allowing for spectators or other users such as LBTDK Taekwon-Do, capacity will be exceeded. The application shows no understanding of what chaos and confrontation such concentrated parking activity and in/out movements will cause in this totally unsuited location. Once the 18 parking spaces next to my house are filled, the car park of choice will be Highfields 'narrow road with wheels on the verge. That is closer to the pitches and likely access than the main car park and get away will be easier. Highfield is narrow and on a bus route. Road safety is a major concern. Experience demonstrates that introducing no parking road signs will not solve the problem. They will be ignored by many. We can expect major hold up scenes similar to school start and finish but frequent rather

than short lived and predictable. No assessment has been made of parking requirements and traffic movement for the extra attendance for competitions and events. Experience says gridlock is guaranteed with no access for emergency vehicles for significant periods. The constant disturbance throughout the day from early morning until late evening and beyond is totally unacceptable in a quiet residential area with both old people and young children. Should adults and children alike fit sleep neatly into the slot between 10pm and 7.30am?

No Management Plan or Additional Staff

The facility, dedicated to football, is planned to operate in excess of 80hrs a week for 52 weeks a year with up to 128 players plus unaccounted spectators on site at any one time. Regrettably football suffers a high level of hooliganism and bad language. This small area, hidden from view so close to private gardens is totally unsuitable. Will spectators use the Sports Hall toilet facilities or our hedges? Who will police the risk to school and neighbours' property? Who will police the confrontation and noise? There is no Management Plan, an apparent expectation to operate with no additional staff and an expectation that control of noise and general behaviour will be based on asking nicely!

There is no Traffic Plan and no hope that one would be adhered to. The drop-off car park became staff parking only, planned 12 drop-off spaces are now 6, the main car park is locked when LBTKD Taekwon-Do use the sports hall in the evenings, access along the end of my garden is not barred and car park lights remain on excessively. These previous conditions and promises have not been adhered to we have no expectation that proposed time limits or any plans delivered in response to our concerns will be.

Conclusion

I strongly oppose this application. It represents a totally unacceptable loss of a green area essential for the health and welfare of around 1000 school pupils for a facility essential for none of them not even the few footballers who might benefit. The proposed location for a commercial enterprise of this kind is totally unsuitable. Neighbours who have lived in a good state of harmony with the school for decades will be constantly disturbed throughout waking hours and into each end of sleeping hours. Should adults and children alike fit sleep neatly into the slot between 10pm and 7.30am? Traffic chaos is inevitable. The community doesn't need this facility in this place. The main beneficiary will be the company responsible for this and other schools. I request its outright rejection.

Yours faithfully

Rod Emery