

North Hertfordshire District Council

By email only

Date: 21st August 2024

FAO Peter Bull

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

Application Reference: 24/01604/FP

Site: Temple Dinsley, (formerly The Princess Helena College), School Lane, Preston, Hertfordshire, SG4 7RT

Proposal: Full Planning Permission : Change of use of the Former Princess Helena College and associated land from a former all-girls boarding school to 69no. private residential dwellings etc.

Sport England Reference: PA/24/E/NH/68349

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Sport England's Position

It is not currently possible for Sport England to make an informed assessment of the application against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular paragraph 103, and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy. We therefore submit an **objection** as a statutory consultee pending receipt of the requested information set out in the response.

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

In summary, the proposal involves a full application for the change of use of the former Princess Helena College site (known as Temple Dinsley) to a residential led development involving the conversion of some of the historic buildings and the demolition and redevelopment of others. The former college site extends to 27.8 hectares and includes the college's playing field to the south east of the site which is separated from the college's buildings by parkland. The playing field is principally natural turf and aerial photographs indicate that it was marked out for a running track, rounders pitches and a hockey pitch when the college was operational. There are also three macadam tennis courts, a jump pit/runway and a small pavilion/store building in the north western part of the playing field.

The planning application proposes that the playing field be retained and the majority of it be used for forming a cricket square and outfield that would be used as a second cricket ground by Preston Cricket Club. Two of the three tennis courts and the jump pit/runway would be removed and a new cricket pavilion would be sited in its place. The existing pavilion/store would be relocated to be used as a maintenance store for the cricket club. It is intended that the retained tennis court be used for private use by the residents of the proposed development. It is intended that the playing field be leased to Preston Cricket Club on a long term lease under a peppercorn rent.

Separate to the playing field, the application proposes the demolition of the college's sports hall and outdoor swimming pool and their redevelopment for residential. A single disused tennis court in the woodland to the north of the college buildings would be refurbished and made available for community use. As set out in paragraphs 6.97-6.104 of the Planning Statement the loss of these facilities is proposed to be offset by the proposals for the cricket pitch and tennis court.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

As set out above the proposals for the change of use of the former college site involve both the loss of existing sports facilities and enhancements to the retained

playing field and tennis court to facilitate community use. The proposals may collectively offer potential in principle to meet exception 5 of the above policy. However, there is insufficient information to enable Sport England to adequately assess the proposal against exception 5 or to make a substantive response. I have consulted the ECB and the LTA (the governing bodies for cricket and tennis) and they are also of the view that further information is requested to allow an informed assessment to be made. Please therefore could the following information be provided:

1. Cricket Pitch and Pavilion Proposals:

- Feasibility Study: The Total Turf Solutions feasibility study referred to in section 5.14 of the Design & Access Statement together with a topographical plan of the playing field. This is requested in order to make an informed assessment of the technical suitability of the proposals for the new cricket pitch.
- Pavilion Design & Layout: Details of the design and layout of the pavilion. This has been described in paragraph 3.26 of the Planning Statement but no plans appear to have been submitted. This is required to assess the suitability of the design of the pavilion for community cricket and the Council may also require this to assess its acceptability in relation to other planning considerations such as Green Belt and heritage.
- Retained Cricket Pavilion/Store: Details of the facilities provided in the existing playing field pavilion plus whether the building is portable. If the building is not portable, clarification is requested of whether an assessment has been made of the condition of the facility to determine whether relocating it is feasible given its potential age and condition. This is requested to understand whether relocating the building is feasible.
- Parking: Details are requested of how car parking provision will be made to support the operation of the cricket club. The away teams, officials and some of the home team players will not reside in the Preston area and therefore will be dependent on accessing the site by car given the rural location and peak time use of the playing field being at weekends. Suitable car parking provision will therefore be required to prevent a potential overspill issue outside of the playing field site which may prejudice the use of the site for cricket and create highways or residential amenity issues. This is requested to assess whether the facility will meet the needs of the cricket club and whether it would prejudice the operation of the cricket pitch.
- Delivery Proposals: While reference is provided to the cricket pitch and pavilion forming part of the planning application proposals and offsetting the impact of the proposals on the existing sports facilities, the Draft Heads of Terms refers to these facilities being funded by Preston Cricket Club and ECB

grant funding. It is therefore unclear whether the applicant or the cricket club would be responsible for delivering these facilities. If the cricket facilities are proposed as mitigation for the loss of other sports facilities in the development then it would be expected to be the responsibility of the applicant to fund and deliver the cricket facilities. The same would apply if the facilities have been proposed to meet the additional community sports facility needs generated by the residential development. Furthermore, it is unclear how the delivery of these facilities could be secured within a defined timescale as part of any planning permission if they are dependent on being funded and delivered by another party. This is pertinent as the despite the reference in the Heads of Terms document, the ECB has advised that they have not been engaged by the cricket club about the project and currently Hertfordshire Cricket Board only offer grants of up to £10,000 towards facility projects. This information is requested to assess the acceptability of the proposals for delivering the facilities.

- Preston Cricket Club Lease: Details of the Heads of Terms for a lease of the playing field in order to assess the suitability of a proposed lease. A suitable lease will be essential as the club will be unlikely to be able to secure any grant or loan funding to support facility investment and maintenance without adequate security of tenure being in place. This in turn will affect the potential for the cricket pitch and pavilion facilities to be delivered. Confirmation is also requested that securing the completion of a lease based on the agreed Heads of Terms can be secured through a planning permission. This information is requested to assess the proposals for securing the tenure of the facility through the planning application.

2. Tennis Court Proposals

- Loss of Tennis Courts: Details of the rationale for the loss of two tennis courts on the playing field site i.e. has the cricket pitch feasibility study confirmed that this is essential for providing a pitch with ECB compliant boundaries?, have other options for siting the cricket pavilion been explored? This is pertinent as the LTA has advised that retaining 2 or 3 of these tennis courts as part of a cricket club site would offer more potential to meet community tennis needs on a financially sustainable basis than the current proposal to retain a single court with no supporting facilities to the north of the application site. The ECB has also advised that a cricket pitch could be accommodated without displacing the tennis courts. This information is requested to assess the rationale for the loss of the tennis courts.
- Retained Tennis Court (Playing Field): Confirmation of whether the court will be refurbished as part of the proposals to support future use given that the

condition of the courts is unclear and the facility will presumably have not been maintained for over 3 years. It would be helpful if an explanation could be provided of why retaining this court as a private facility for the residents of the development is proposed instead of refurbishing the court to the north of the application given that the courts on the playing field would offer more potential to meet community needs and be financially sustainable as a public facility. Clarity is also requested of whether the applicant has considered converting the courts for padel tennis rather than conventional tennis given that the LTA has advised that there is significantly greater demand for padel tennis courts in the area than conventional tennis courts. This information is requested to allow an informed assessment to be made of the proposals for retaining the existing tennis court.

- Retained Tennis Court (Adjoining Dower House): Confirmation of whether a feasibility study has been undertaken to identify the works required to restore this tennis court in order to identify the scope of the works required and financial viability of restoring the courts. This is pertinent given the limitations of a single standalone tennis court for public use in terms of meeting community need and being financially viable to sustain. As a single court would be more suitable for private use, it would be helpful if an explanation could be provided of why refurbishing this court as a private facility for the residents of the development was not considered instead of the current proposal to retain a court on the proposed cricket club site for this purpose. This information is requested to allow an informed assessment to be made of the proposals for retaining the existing tennis court.
3. Sports Hall and Outdoor Swimming Pool: Details of any condition surveys or other evidence to verify that the sports hall and swimming pool are in a poor state of repair and no longer feasible to bring back into operational use. This information is requested to allow an informed assessment to be made of the impact of the proposals on sports hall and swimming pool provision.

Sport England's position

Sport England's interim position on this application is to submit an **objection** which is our standard position for any proposal where insufficient information has been provided to allow a substantive response to be provided as a statutory consultee and should not be interpreted as being indicative of our position once the requested information has been provided. We will review our position following the receipt of the further information requested above and will then, in accordance with the Order respond within 21 days.

In view of the range of queries and issues raised above I would advocate that the applicant discusses the response with Sport England and the Council in advance of further information being formally submitted in response to the queries.

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

Yours sincerely,

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Planning Manager

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Sport England's 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at: www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy are:

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.