

28 JUNE 2022 PLANNING COMMITTEE

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PLAN/2022/0432

WARD: Canalside

LOCATION: Eastwood Centre, 247A Albert Drive, Sheerwater, Woking

PROPOSAL: Erection of 4m high by 135m length timber acoustic fencing against part of existing Northern perimeter of site.

APPLICANT: Woking Borough Council

OFFICER: Joanne Hollingdale

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE:

The application has been submitted by Woking Borough Council and therefore falls outside the Scheme of Delegation.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks planning permission for the erection of 4m high by 135m length timber acoustic fencing against part of existing Northern perimeter of site adjacent to the existing artificial grass pitch (AGP) on the site.

PLANNING STATUS

- Urban Area
- Priority Places
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA Zone B (400m-5km)
- Flood Zone 1 and 2 (some areas)
- Nearby Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area & SSSI
- Part of wider sports pitches site Area of High Archaeological potential

RECOMMENDATION

Permit subject to conditions.

SITE DESCRIPTION

This application relates to the sports pitches located to the north of the Eastwood Centre and Bishop David Brown School. As part of the Sheerwater Regeneration a new leisure centre was constructed along with a new AGP and two new grass pitches on the school playing fields. The facilities are used by the school and the public and other users outside of school hours and the AGP is home to Sheerwater Football Club. This development is now complete and open for use.

To the north of the site is the Basingstoke Canal with the rear gardens of residential dwellings bordering the northern side of the canal bank. To the east are dwellings which front Lambourne Crescent. To the south is Bishop David Brown Secondary School and Broadmere Primary School and dwellings which front Loder Close. To the west are dwellings under construction on the former athletics track which are part of the Sheerwater Regeneration development.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The most relevant planning history (excluding the history relating to Bishop David Brown School) is:

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PLAN/2018/0374 - Section 73 application to remove Condition 26 (bund), to vary Condition 4 (approved plans insofar as they relate to the Leisure Centre and sports pitches), Condition 23 (phase 1b playing fields timeline), to submit details to satisfy Condition 21 (on/off-site drainage works), Condition 27 (drainage details for phase 1a(i)), Condition 28 (drainage details for phase 1a(ii)), Condition 29 (drainage details for phase 1a(iii)), Condition 30 (drainage details for phase 1b), Condition 52 (external materials for Leisure Centre), Condition 53 (details of finished floor levels for Leisure Centre), Condition 54 (sustainability - substitution of combined heat and power plant with a ground source heat pump) and amendments to wording of Condition 36 (phase 1c details of front boundary enclosures), Condition 38 (phase 1c biodiversity enhancement measures), Condition 43 (phase 1c external materials), Condition 45 (phase 1c details of bin storage areas), Condition 46 (phase 1c details of photovoltaic panels), Condition 47 (phase 1c sustainability measures), Condition 49 (protection of residential properties from noise), Condition 51 (phase 1c details of play area/trim trail delivery) to alter the timing for the submission of details for approval, of planning permission PLAN/2015/1260 for the redevelopment of the Sheerwater Estate. Permitted 18.04.2019 subject to a S106 Legal Agreement and Executive Obligations.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks planning permission for erection of 4m high by 135m length timber acoustic fencing against part of existing Northern perimeter of site adjacent to the existing AGP on the site.

The proposed fence would be located outside of the fencing to the AGP but inside the green boundary fencing which forms the boundary to the playing pitches and school site.

CONSULTATIONS

Sport England: Sport England does not consider that the proposal affects the quality or quantity of sports pitches at the site or adversely affect their use. Sport England is therefore satisfied that the proposed development meets exception 2 of our playing fields policy, in that:

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.

This being the case, Sport England does not wish to raise an objection to this application.

Natural England: No objection as the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites.

Environment Agency: Do not wish to be consulted on this application.

WBC Drainage and Flood Risk Engineer: From the details submitted it is not clear that the proposal during construction or the final location of the fence would not impact on the existing drainage system. A condition requiring the submission of a construction method statement is therefore recommended.

WBC Environmental Health Officer: Having considered the Environmental Noise Investigation report by Wood dated 15th March 2022 submitted with the above application, subject to the proposed 4m high barrier being constructed in full accordance with the report's recommendations and conclusions, there is no further comment to submit.

WBC Arboricultural Officer: The arboricultural information provided is considered acceptable and should be complied with in full.

REPRESENTATIONS

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None received.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Woking Core Strategy (2012):

- CS5 – Priority Places
- CS7 - Biodiversity and nature conservation
- CS9 – Flooding and water management
- CS16 – Infrastructure delivery
- CS17 – Open space, green infrastructure, sport and recreation
- CS19 – Social and community infrastructure
- CS20 – Heritage and Conservation
- CS21 - Design
- CS24 – Woking's landscape and townscape
- CS25 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development

Development Management Policies DPD (2016):

- DM2 – Trees and Landscaping
- DM4 – Development in the Vicinity of Basingstoke Canal
- DM3 – Facilities for Outdoor Sport and Outdoor Recreation
- DM5 – Environmental Pollution
- DM7 – Noise and Light pollution
- DM20 – Heritage Assets and their Settings

Site Allocations DPD (2021):

- UA24 – Land within Sheerwater Priority Place

PLANNING ISSUES

1. The main planning issues to consider in the determination of this application is the impact of the proposed acoustic fence on the sports provision, visual amenity and nearby Conservation Area, neighbour amenity, ecology and drainage.

Background

2. The sports pitches/playing fields within Bishop David Brown School were replaced by the existing AGP and new grass pitches as part of the Sheerwater Regeneration proposals, to enhance the sports pitch provision in the local area to support the new residential development and to mitigate the redevelopment of the former athletics track (which had a sports pitch within the centre of the track and was previously home to Sheerwater Football Club). The new AGP and adjacent grass pitches within the grounds of Bishop David Brown School are used by the school during school hours and by other users outside of school hours and at weekends. The AGP is also home to Sheerwater Football Club. It is understood that since the use of the AGP commenced complaints have been received regarding noise resulting from the use of the AGP. This proposal for an acoustic fence has been submitted to address the noise issues resulting from the use of the AGP.

Impact on sports provision

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3. Policy DM3 of the DM Policies DPD supports the provision and intensification of use of existing facilities subject to a number of criteria including ensuring no adverse visual or amenity impacts. A 4 metre high close boarded timber acoustic fence is proposed for a length of 135 metres for the width of the AGP with an overhang of around 10 metres at either end. The acoustic fence is proposed to be located within the green steel fencing which has historically formed the boundary of the school sports fields but outside of the new 4.5 metre high fencing that has been installed around the new AGP. The proposed timber acoustic fence would not therefore interfere or prejudice the use of the AGP or the lighting columns (which light the pitch) which are located outside of the fencing to the AGP.
4. It is also considered that the installation of the 4 metre high acoustic fence would have a beneficial impact on the use of the AGP by mitigating the noise impacts resulting from its use (see neighbouring amenity section below). The proposed development is therefore considered to comply with Policies CS17 of the Woking Core Strategy and Policy DM3 of the DM Policies DPD and the NPPF.

Impact on visual amenity and nearby Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area

5. To the north of the application site is the Basingstoke Canal which is also designated as a Conservation Area. However the proposed acoustic fence would be located outside of the Conservation Area. Local planning policies seek to ensure that new development is of high quality and is not harmful to an area or the setting of any heritage asset (i.e. the Conservation Area). In addition Policy DM4 of the DM Policies DPD also seeks to ensure that proposals would enhance the character, setting and enjoyment of the canal and would not result in the loss of important views in the vicinity of the canal.
6. The proposed acoustic fence would be 4 metres high and constructed from timber with solid horizontal timber slats and is considered to have a suitable and attractive appearance. It should also be noted that its proposed height at 4 metres would be around 0.5 metres lower than the existing black weldmesh fencing around the AGP which is around 4.5 metres high.
7. The proposed 4 metre high acoustic fence would be viewed within the wider school/leisure centre site but would be viewed against the backdrop of the mature trees and vegetation which are located outside the sports pitches site and which border the southern side of the canal. Although the proposed acoustic fence would be viewed within the sport pitches site, it would be viewed as 'part and parcel' of the sports pitch development which has an AGP, 4.5 metre high black weldmesh fencing and 15 metre high lighting columns. The wider site also contains the leisure centre building and a variety of school buildings around the school yard.
8. There would be some views of the proposed acoustic fence from the existing residential dwellings bordering the east of the site and the south-west of the site, the new dwellings under construction to the west of the sports pitches and those dwellings that will be constructed as part of the Sheerwater Regeneration to the south-west of the sports pitches. However whilst the fence would be viewed by these residential units, it would be viewed over some distance and would be viewed in the context of the wider school, leisure centre and sports pitches on the site, the adjacent school site of Broadmere Primary School and against the backdrop of the existing mature trees and vegetation. Within this context the proposed acoustic fence is not considered to adversely affect the appearance of the site.
9. With regard to the potential for views of the acoustic fence from outside the site, to the north is the Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area which has a towpath on its southern

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side. As noted above the proposed acoustic fence would be located outside the Conservation Area and located between the canal towpath and the green steel fencing bordering the sports pitch site are mature trees and understory vegetation which provide a dense natural buffer to the towpath limiting existing views of the site. It should also be noted that along parts of the canal the vegetation buffer is slightly built up with higher ground, giving a bank-like appearance and the sports pitch itself is located on lower ground than the canal towpath. The effect of this is that the overall height of the acoustic fence would appear lower when viewed from this direction. Along some limited parts of the towpath there are some glimpses of the sports pitches where the vegetation is less dense, although the existing black fencing tends to fade into the vegetation somewhat. In wintertime, the views are likely to be more apparent where the vegetation is deciduous. The provision of the acoustic fence would restrict views into the site and would be viewed where there are small gaps in the existing trees and vegetation alongside the canal towpath. Nonetheless as the fence would be timber, even in views it would form a sympathetic natural backdrop to the existing vegetation along the towpath. It is not considered that the proposal would result in the loss of any important views on this section of the towpath. It should also be noted that on the northern side of the canal the rear gardens of dwellings immediately adjoin the canal bank and a variety of domestic buildings, decking, boat inlets and other garden features are prominently viewed in the context of the canal. Overall where views would be possible it is not considered that the proposed development would adversely affect the setting of the Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area or the views from the towpath itself.

10. Outside of the green steel boundary fencing to the site are trees and vegetation and the application is accompanied by arboricultural information. The information identifies that 6no. trees would need to be removed to facilitate the installation of the fence. However the tree survey identifies that these are all Category C trees (trees of low quality and value) and that two of trees are Ash which are showing Ash Die Back Disease or symptoms of this. Some of the other trees to be removed also have issues e.g. are dying or have stress cracks on stem. Crown lifting of some retained trees is also proposed to provide clearance for the fence. Whilst some tree removal is proposed, it is limited and the trees to be removed are of low value. In addition given the extent of the existing trees and vegetation adjacent to the canal the removal of trees would have a very limited/negligible visual impact and thus replacement planting is not considered necessary or justified in this case. The arboricultural information also proposes hand digging for the fence post holes to the specified depth and all works where specified would be under the supervision of an Arboricultural Consultant. The Council's Arboricultural Officer has reviewed the submitted information and has advised that it is acceptable and should be complied with in full (condition 3).
11. In visual terms the proposed acoustic fence is considered to be acceptable and would not adversely affect the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area including the setting of the nearby Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area and character or enjoyment of the Basingstoke Canal. The proposed development is therefore considered to comply with Policies CS20 and CS21 of the Woking Core Strategy, Policies DM2, DM3 and DM4 of the DM Policies DPD and the NPPF.

Impact on Neighbouring Amenity

12. The closest residential dwellings to the AGP are those to the north of the Basingstoke Canal. The AGP has been in use since July 2021 and the pitch is used at various points throughout the day on weekdays and weekends for training and football matches as well as by the school. It is understood that the Council has received complaints due to

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disruptive vocal noise (i.e. shouting from coaches and players) arising from football matches and training sessions.

13. Following the complaints a noise assessment was undertaken to characterise the existing local noise climate, including noise sensitive receptors e.g. nearby dwellings. The submitted noise assessment report advises that noise levels have been assessed in accordance with the Sport England: Artificial Grass Pitch Acoustics – Planning Implications document. The noise assessment undertaken shows that during the football matches monitored the artificial grass pitch criterion in the guidance was exceeded. The worst case match resulted in an exceedance of 7 dB(A) above the criterion. The noise sources influencing the sound environment were the activity taking place on the AGP i.e. shouting from players, coaches, spectator shouts/claps and the kicking of footballs. Given the results of the noise monitoring on site, potential mitigation solutions were considered which included a localised noise barrier around the technical area (to screen noise from the coaches shouting), the relocation of the technical area to the southern perimeter of the pitch or the provision of a 4 metre high close board timber barrier installed along the northern perimeter of the AGP in order to screen all noise arising from players shouting, coaches shouting and spectator interaction.
14. Following an assessment of the proposed mitigation solutions, the noise assessment report sets out that the provision of a 4 metre high close board timber barrier installed along the northern perimeter of the AGP would satisfy the artificial grass pitch noise criterion and that this will stop the direct line of sight between the pitch and the properties to the north of the canal and mitigate the noise levels considerably. The noise assessment report also recommends that the barrier is a close board timber construction with a minimum surface mass density of 10kg/m². The Council's Environmental Health Officer raises no objection to the application subject to the construction of the fence being in accordance with the report's recommendations and conclusions.
15. As the installation of the 4 metre high acoustic timber fence would reduce the noise levels to within the criterion for artificial grass pitches, it is considered that the proposal would result in a beneficial effect to the amenities of the nearby residential occupiers. Conditions are included in the recommendation to ensure the timely installation of the acoustic fence, its retention thereafter and its specification in accordance with the noise assessment report recommendation and conclusions. Subject to these conditions the proposal is considered to comply with Policy CS21 of the Core Strategy, Policies DM5 and DM7 of the DM Policies DPD and the NPPF.

Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage

16. A very small part of the position for the acoustic fence is located in Flood Zone 2 (medium risk), however the installation of a fence is classed as minor development. In addition leisure uses are classed as less vulnerable uses which are appropriate in Flood Zone 2. When the new sports pitches were installed a new surface water drainage system was also installed with the pitches. Therefore it is necessary to ensure that the provision of fence post holes do not adversely affect the installed surface water drainage system. In this regard the Council's Flood Risk and Drainage Engineer has raised no objection to the proposal subject to a condition requiring a method statement to be submitted and approved to ensure the protection of the existing surface water drainage system on site. Subject to this condition the proposed development is considered to comply with Policy CS9 of the Woking Core Strategy and the NPPF.

Ecology

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17. To the north of the application site is the Basingstoke Canal which is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The proposed acoustic timber fence would be located outside of the SSSI and its proposed installation is not considered to result in any adverse impacts to the interest features of the nearby SSSI. Furthermore Natural England has raised no objection to the proposed development. The proposed development would therefore conserve the biodiversity of the area and comply with Policy CS7 of the Woking Core Strategy, Policy DM4 of the DM Policies DPD and the NPPF.

Other matters

18. Part of the wider sports pitches are covered by an area of high archaeological potential, although this designation does not extend into the area of the proposed fence. In any event the existing pitches have recently been subject to groundworks (to construct the replacement pitches with new drainage etc.) as part of the previous planning permission which was subject to an archaeological written scheme of investigation.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

19. Given the nature of the development and as no floorspace is created the development is not CIL Liable.

CONCLUSION

20. Subject to the conditions set out it is considered that the proposed development is acceptable and would not result in any harm to the sports provision, visual amenity, flood risk and surface water drainage and ecology and would result in a positive impact to nearby neighbouring amenity through noise reduction from the artificial grass pitch. The proposal therefore accords with the policies of the Development Plan as set out in this report and the NPPF and is recommended for approval. In considering this application the Council has given regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application and to any other material considerations.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning file – PLAN/2022/0432

RECOMMENDATION

PERMIT subject to the following conditions:

1. The timber acoustic fence hereby permitted shall be installed in accordance with the application details and approved plans within 3 months from the date of this planning permission and once installed, the timber acoustic fence shall be retained and maintained in accordance with the approved details for the lifetime of adjacent artificial grass sports pitch.

Reason: To protect the environment and amenities of the occupants of nearby neighbouring properties and to comply with Policy CS21 of the Woking Core Strategy and the NPPF.

2. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans listed below:

Site Location Plan showing fence position received on 06.05.2022;

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Block Plan showing fence position received on 06.05.2022;
Elevation detail of Jakcoustic fence received on 06.05.2022;
Tree Constraints Plan received on 06.05.2022; and
Tree Protection Plan received on 06.05.2022.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is completed in accordance with the approved plans.

3. Protective measures shall be carried out in strict accordance with the Arboricultural Information provided by Dryad Tree Specialists received on 18.05.2022 including the convening of a pre-commencement meeting and arboricultural supervision as indicated. No works or demolition shall take place until the tree protective measures have been implemented. Any deviation from the works prescribed or methods agreed in the report will require prior written approval from the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure reasonable measures are taken to safeguard trees in the interest of local amenity and the enhancement of the development itself to comply with Policy CS21 of the Woking Core Strategy 2012.

4. No development shall commence, until a detailed construction method statement has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority that demonstrates the proposed fencing construction will not impact the existing drainage system for the area. This method statement must demonstrate how the existing surface water drainage system will be protected during the works including from vehicle movements to and from the area of the proposed fence. The scheme shall then be constructed in accordance with the approved method statement.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not adversely affect the existing surface water drainage system which was installed to achieve a high standard of sustainability for these new pitches and to comply with Policies CS9 and CS16 of the Woking Core Strategy 2012 and the NPPF.

5. The timber acoustic fence hereby approved shall be installed in accordance with the recommendations and conclusions set out in the submitted Environmental Noise Investigation report by Wood (ref: 806807-WOOD-ZZ-XX-RP-ON-00001_A-P01.01 (Rev1)) dated March 2022 (received on 23.05.2022) which shall include that the timber acoustic fence hereby approved is of a close board timber construction with a minimum surface mass density of 10kg/m². Once installed, the timber acoustic fence shall be retained and maintained in accordance with the requirements of this condition for the lifetime of adjacent artificial grass sports pitch.

Reason: To protect the amenities of the occupants of nearby neighbouring properties and to comply with Policy CS21 of the Woking Core Strategy and the NPPF.

Informatives

1. The Council confirms that in assessing this planning application it has worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive way, in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The applicant is advised that under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, works which will be audible at the site boundary will be restricted to the following hours:-

8.00 a.m. - 6.00 p.m. Monday to Friday
8.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. Saturday

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and not at all on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

3. The applicant is advised that this planning permission does not convey the right to enter onto or build on land not within their ownership.