

**Proposed development: Full Planning Application for refurbishment of two existing AGPs (Artificial Grass Pitches) with replacement artificial grass pitch surfaces, floodlights, ball stop fencing and hard standing areas**

**Site address:  
Witton Country Park  
Preston Old Road  
Blackburn  
BB2 2TP**

**Applicant: Blackburn With Darwen Borough Council**

**Ward: Livesey With Pleasington**

**Councillor Derek Hardman  
Councillor John Pearson  
Councillor Paul Marrow**



## **1.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION**

**1.1** APPROVE – Subject to recommended conditions (see paragraph 4.0).

## **2.0 KEY ISSUES/SUMMARY OF PLANNING BALANCE**

**2.1** The proposal will deliver two modern Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) which can be used throughout the year. It supports the Borough's planning strategy for provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt. The proposal is also satisfactory from a technical point of view, with all issues having been addressed through the application, or capable of being controlled or mitigated through planning conditions.

**2.2** The application is before the committee as it is a Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council site and the application has been submitted by the Council's Leisure Team.

## **3.0 RATIONALE**

### **3.1 Site and Surroundings**

**3.1.1** The application site comprises two existing Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs), fencing, flood lighting, changing rooms/admin office and parking situated within the grounds of Witton Country Park. The pitches have independent access for vehicular traffic from the main Witton Country Park entrance with pedestrian routes permeating through the site.

**3.1.2** The park land extends to the north and west with residential properties to the south and east on Preston Old Road. The two adjacent artificial grass pitches (AGPs) are surrounded by amenity grassland. The River Darwen, bordered by semi-natural woodland, is situated north of site.

**3.1.3** Public transport links are accessible from the site, with the nearest bus stop being, located a short walk (approx. 300m) on Preston Old Road. From here there are regular services to Blackburn Town Centre and the surrounding area.

### **3.2 Proposed Development**

**3.2.1** The proposal is a full planning application for the refurbishment of two existing AGPs (Artificial Grass Pitches) with replacement artificial grass pitch surfaces, floodlights, ball stop fencing and hard standing areas.

**3.2.2** The proposal has been prepared in accordance with published Design Guidance Notes (The Football Association (FA) / Sport England) pertinent to external artificial sports facility provision which involves:

- Open steel mesh ball stop fencing and entrance gates around the entire AGP perimeter at 4.5m above ground level.

- New open steel mesh pitch perimeter barrier and entrance gates internally within the fenced enclosure to segregate the pitch playing area (the field of play) from adjoining hard standing areas are 1.2m and 2.0m above ground level.
- Thirty two new luminaires mounted onto sixteen replacement floodlight masts located along Northern and Southern sides of both AGPs at 15m above ground level.
- New hard landscaping treatments around the refurbished AGPs are restricted to additional porous asphalt surfacing.
- Surplus area of previous AGP (the Western AGP) returned to grass surfacing. All other grassed land surrounding the AGPs affected by the development reinstated to grass (in accordance with in accordance with BS 4428:1989 Code of Practice for General Landscape Operations).

### **3.3 Development Plan**

3.3.1 The Development Plan comprises the Core Strategy and adopted Local Plan Part 2 – Site Allocations and Development Management Policies. In determining the current proposal, the following are considered to be the most relevant policies:

#### **3.3.2 Core Strategy**

- CS16 – Form and Design of New Development

#### **3.3.3 Local Plan Part 2**

- Policy 3 – Green Belt
- Policy 7 – Sustainable and Viable Development
- Policy 8 – Development and People
- Policy 9 – Development and the Environment
- Policy 10 – Accessibility and Transport
- Policy 11 – Design
- Policy 40 – Integrating Green Infrastructure and Ecological Networks with New Development

### **3.4 Other Material Planning Considerations**

#### **3.4.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

The National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (Framework) is a material consideration in planning decisions. The Framework sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which has three overarching objectives, economic, social and environmental. Paragraph 11 of the Framework explains that for decision taking, this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Section 13 of the Framework

relates to protecting Green Belt Land, and Section 8 relates to promoting healthy communities.

### **3.5 Assessment**

3.5.1 In assessing this application there are a number of important material considerations that need to be taken into account as follows:

- Principle;
- Highways and access;
- Design and Layout;
- Amenity impact; and
- Environmental issues

#### Principle

3.5.2 The principle of the development is considered under the Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies and the National Planning Policy Framework 2018 for development within the defined Green Belt.

3.5.3 The Framework 2018 which was updated in July reiterates the special protection of the Green Belt where there is a general presumption against inappropriate development which is, by definition, harmful to the openness and permanence of the Green Belt. One of the exceptions in the Green Belt is the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The Council's Local Plan Part 2, Policy 3 'The Green Belt' echoes national policy in this stance.

3.5.4 As an existing outdoor sports facility, the principle of the current proposal is considered to be acceptable and in accordance with the provisions of the development plan in terms of delivering development within the Green Belt. This is subject to the more detailed considerations also being in accordance with adopted development plan policy and national guidance.

#### 3.5.5 Highways and Access

Core Strategy Policy 22: Accessibility Strategy and Local Plan Policy 10: Accessibility and Transport, aim to ensure that new developments provide appropriate provision for access, car parking and servicing so as to ensure the safe, efficient and convenient movement of all highway users is not prejudiced.

3.5.6 Parking provision for the development is to be retained as per the existing set up with no further demand expected based upon the scope of the works being for the refurbishment of site and not the provision of additional pitches.

3.5.7 Highways Colleagues are appraising the submission with the response to be made available by way of an update report. Overall, the scope of information submitted in support of the transport and highways aspects of the proposal illustrate an acceptable form of development. As such, subject to no objection from Highways Colleagues, it is in accordance with the requirements of Policy 10 of the Local Plan Part 2.

### 3.5.8 Design and Layout

Policy 11 of the Local Plan requires development to present a good standard of design, demonstrating an understanding of the wider context and make a positive contribution to the local area. The policy sets out a list of detailed design requirements relating to character, public realm, movement, sustainability, diversity, materials, colour and viability. This underpins the main principles of sustainable development contained in the NPPF.

3.5.9 A detailed Design and Access Statement has been provided which sets out the key design principles which are taken forward in the application proposals design response, reflecting the policy requirements include:

- Proximity changing rooms
- Proximity reception facilities
- Proximity for management and supervision of users
- Avoidance of unacceptable impact to residential neighbours (noise, visual and residential amenity) or the ability to introduce impact mitigation measures
- Avoidance of unacceptable impact to any local biodiversity and ecology or the ability to introduce impact mitigation measures

3.5.10 The installed appearance of perimeter ball stop fencing (4.5m high), pitch perimeter barriers (1.2m and 2.0m high) and associated gated entrances will be finished to polyester powder coated RAL6005 moss green, all supported with an intermediate post system and entrance gates of matching colour.

3.5.11 The comprehensive details submitted illustrate a modern design and layout which also reflects the existing pitches infrastructure and landscaping. As such the proposal is considered to accord with the provisions of the relevant policies of the development plan.

### 3.5.12 Amenity Impact

Policy 8 of the LPP2 relates to the impact of development upon people. Importantly, at section (ii) of the policy there is a requirement for all new development to secure satisfactory levels of amenity for surrounding uses and future occupiers of the development itself. Reference is made to matters including; noise, vibration, odour, light, dust, privacy/overlooking and the relationship between buildings.

3.5.13 The proposed type and quality of ball-stop fencing is consistent with current Football Association (FA) technical requirements for fencing to enclose artificial grass sports pitches. Panels are insulated from the posts using neoprene washers fitted to every fence post / mesh fixing point to aid noise reduction and acoustic attenuation by reducing rattle and vibration from ball impacts.

3.5.14 To ensure that overspill and backward light projected outside the AGP areas from flood lights does not create unacceptable light impact to residential neighbours, luminaires will be installed with minimal aiming angles (as recommended by The Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP)) to reduce horizontal and vertical overspill.

3.5.15 The Council's Public Protection Team has reviewed the application and offers no objection to the development subject to standard hours of construction condition. As such, the overall impact of the proposed development is considered to accord with the provisions of the adopted and Local Plan Part 2 as any potential harm to amenity has been addressed or can be adequately controlled or mitigated through planning conditions. Indeed, the introduction of modern fencing is likely to see a reduction in noise from the existing pitches.

#### 3.5.16 Drainage, Flood Risk & Ecology

Policy 9 of the adopted Local Plan Part 2 sets out that development will be required to demonstrate that it will not be at an unacceptable risk of flooding and impact on environmental assets or interests, including habitats, species and trees.

3.5.17 Following a review of the application, no objection has been offered by the Environment Agency; subject to the applicant being made aware that they may require a permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 from the Environment Agency.

3.5.18 The application has also been accompanied by an Ecological Appraisal which identifies that no protected species are present within the vicinity of site. Additionally, measures are recommended for the control of invasive plant species and mitigation measures to no unacceptable adverse impacts are likely to occur. As such, the overall impact of the proposed development is considered to accord with the provisions of the adopted Local Plan Part 2 as any potential risk of flooding or ecological harm has been addressed or can be adequately controlled or mitigated through planning conditions.

#### 3.5.19 Summary:

This report assesses the full planning application for refurbishment of two existing AGPs (Artificial Grass Pitches) with replacement artificial grass pitch surfaces, floodlights, ball stop fencing and hard standing areas on Witton Country Park, Blackburn. In considering the proposal a wide range of material considerations have been taken in to account during the assessment of the planning application.

3.5.20 The assessment of the proposal clearly shows that the planning decision must be made in terms of assessing the merits of the case against any potential harm that may result from its implementation. This report concludes the proposal provides for two modern Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) which can be used throughout the year, meeting the policy requirements of the Blackburn with Darwen Core Strategy, Local Plan Part 2, and the National Planning Policy Framework 2018.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to Conditions which relate to the following matters:**

- Commence within 3 years
- Approved details/drawings
- Limitation of construction site works to: 08:00 to 18:00 Mondays to Fridays, 09:00 to 13:00 Saturdays, Not at all on Sundays and Bank Holidays.
- Developed in accordance with the recommendations of the submitted Ecology Assessment.

#### **5.0 CONSULTATIONS**

##### 5.1.1 Drainage Section

No comments yet received and to be provided by way of an update report.

##### 5.1.2 Public Protection

Recommendation conditions:

- Site working hours to be limited to between 8am-6pm (Monday-Friday) and 9am-1pm on Saturdays. No works on Sundays or Bank Holidays.

##### 5.1.3 Highways

No comments yet received and to be provided by way of an update report.

##### 5.1.4 Environment Agency

The developer may require a permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 from the Environment Agency for any proposed works or structures, in, under, over or within 8 metres of the bank of the River Darwen, which is designated a Main River. In particular, no trees or shrubs may be planted, nor fences, buildings, pipelines (including outfalls) or any other structure erected within 8 metres of the top of the bank of the Main River, or landward toe of any flood defence, without an environmental permit. Some activities are also now excluded or exempt. For further information, the developer should refer to the GOV.UK website:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits>.

### 5.1.5 Public consultation

Public consultation has been undertaken, with over 42 letters posted to neighbouring addresses and 2 site notices affixed. The consultation period expires on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018: No letters of representation have been received with any further representations to be provided by way of an update report.

**6.0 CONTACT OFFICER: Alec Hickey, Senior Planner - Development Management.**

**7.0 DATE PREPARED: 01<sup>st</sup> November 2018**