

Morris, Rachael

From: Owen Neal <Owen.Neal@sportengland.org>
Sent: 19 July 2023 11:36
To: Morris, Rachael
Cc: Ben Pridgeon (ben.pridgeon@bidwells.co.uk); erin.porter@bidwells.co.uk
Subject: App Ref: F/23/95045 - WIDE LANE SPORTS GROUND, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON SPORTS GROUND WIDE LANE; SO50 5PE - Sport England Ref: PA/23/SE/ET/64478

Dear Rachel,

The agent has submitted further information which primarily relates to need and usage of the site, in order to demonstrate that the proposed new facilities are justified and respond to local needs.

Table 1 – identifies number of football and rugby games/matches played on the natural turf pitches at the site. It is not clear whether this is university teams/clubs only or whether it includes community club/group matches too. The assumption is that it includes both university and community matchplay.

This equals 3 football matches per week on each pitch x 9no. of pitches.
This equals 1 rugby match per week on each pitch x 4no. rugby pitches.

A good quality football pitch can sustain upto 3 match equivalent sessions per week; a standard pitch can take 2 match equivalent sessions. A good quality rugby pitch can sustain approximately 3 matches per week.

Table 2 shows data on match cancellations due to qualitative issues connected with both weather and overplay. This equates to 27 football match cancellations and 12 rugby match cancellations across their respective seasons.

Table 3 shows the level of training usage of the site by university teams using training grids (13no.). In total this appears to show 22 hours of rugby training per week across 5 university rugby teams; 14 hours of football training per week and 12 hours of lacrosse training per week and 4 hours of ultimate frisbee training per week. Total of 52 training hours.

Table 4 shows details of the bookings by a range of external community clubs/groups/organisations/schools. This shows however, that in relation to the natural turf football pitches there is a mixture of one off bookings; multi-day camps or other fairly infrequent arrangements throughout the year eg one football club has 4 bookings in August, but nothing else throughout the year. The pattern of bookings would seem to indicate that aside from the regular bookings detailed below, the pitches are let out and used outside the academic term in the summer ie from May - September

Of those bookings it would appear that only the following are regular bookings over a sustained period:

AFC Station – 1-3 bookings per month throughout the year
Romsey Town FC – weekly bookings June to August
Southampton City Ultimate Frisbee – weekly bookings June to September
AFC Shirley – 1-2 bookings per month
Locksheath Pumas Rugby Club – weekly bookings from September to April

It is therefore very difficult to assess the average weekly usage of the natural turf pitches.

Looking at the month of August across the football pitches there could be upto approximately 30 bookings. However, it is difficult to quantify this in match equivalent sessions (MES). These include camps and programmes rather than simply matches and training. If 1 match equivalent session equates to 1.5hrs /2 hrs of training or matchplay activity, a camp programme could be double that figure or more even. Total MES for August could be between 30-45 match equivalent sessions. Spread across 9 football pitches this equates to between 4-5 MES per pitch per week during August.

In relation to university bookings/usage, as mentioned earlier, a 'good' quality pitch can support 3 match equivalent sessions per week based on Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance. We do not have any knowledge regarding the quality of the existing natural turf pitches but based on the level of cancellation then it is a safer assumption to consider that they might be standard or even low quality pitches capable of meeting between 1-2 match equivalent sessions per week.

In addition to the total of 27 match sessions there is 14 hours of football training (equivalent to 10 MES) and potentially 5 MES per week from regular external community use throughout the football season. This totals approximately 42 MES across 9 pitches. This breaks down to just under 5 match equivalent sessions per pitch per week. This could rise to the equivalent of 6 MES per pitch per week when infrequent one off bookings are factored in as well as usage for other sports eg lacrosse and ultimate frisbee. This amounts to significant overplay of the natural turf pitches. With the retention of the 7 remaining natural turf football pitches (ie the proposal results in the loss of 2no. natural turf football pitches), then we would consider there to be sufficient demand to justify a football only AGP with some capacity for additional community use.

Sport England is also aware that a range of organisations and clubs interested in booking pitches/facilities at Wide Lane have been turned away since February 2023.

That said, it should be noted that since the Playing Pitch Strategy publication in 2017 a number of AGP projects have come to fruition, all with community use. This includes the triple (parklife) AGP site at Stoneham Lane/Monksbrook as well as new football AGPs at Deer Park secondary school and Wyvern College/school. In total, 5 new full size football 3G AGPs have come forward since the 2017 PPS was published.

In terms of rugby, there is limited university matchplay demand - 1 match equivalent session per pitch per week. However, there is 22 training hours which equates to approximately 15 match equivalent sessions. There is also a regular weekly external booking by a rugby club (Locksheath Pumas). In total, this could equate to demand for at least 20 MES, potentially more. If this usage was distributed evenly across the 4 rugby pitches then this equates to at least 5-6 match equivalent sessions per pitch per week.

The carrying capacity for rugby pitches is different to football and is based on the drainage and maintenance regime. The following table shows the carrying capacity in match equivalent sessions for adult pitches. In the best case scenario where a rugby pitch has pipe and slit drainage and is well maintained then its carrying capacity can achieve 3.5 match sessions a week. However, we do not know the quality/capacity rating for the existing rugby pitches at the site. But clearly, there would appear to be significant overplay issues on the existing rugby pitches once university training; matches and external community use are accounted for.

Rugby union	Natural Inadequate (D0)	2 per week	1.5 per week	0.5 per week
	Natural Adequate (D1)	3 per week	2 per week	1.5 per week

	Pipe Drained (D2)	3.25 per week	2.5 per week	1.75 per week
	Pipe and Slit Drained (D3)	3.5 per week	3 per week	2 per week

It is anticipated that the dual use 3G AGP will soak up the training demand enabling the remaining 3 natural turf rugby pitches (one rugby pitch will be lost to the proposal) to be retained and maintained for matchplay.

The proposal will compromise the ability to mark out and use the cricket pitch in the north west section of the playing field. While this cricket pitch is not in current use by either the community or the university it has not been out of use for a significant period. It may be required in the future. Sport England notes that the university has the potential to bring the 'Island site' to the south back into use for cricket if future demand or need requires. Sport England is also aware that there is a Service Level Agreement up until 2028 between the University and the Council which relates to investment in non-turf pitches at the two remaining cricket squares and the obligation on the University to make these facilities accessible to the community. This agreement will expire in 2028.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, then it is conceivable that there is sufficient demand from across university and community rugby; football and other pitch sports to generate the requirement for the additional 2no. Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) with some spare capacity to absorb additional demand potentially from community use. Sport England would have expected greater engagement with community groups and clubs as well as national governing bodies to test and consider whether the proposal would have wider community benefits to meet existing and future community needs, and we consider this element of the proposal could benefit from further discussion. The new Playing Pitch Strategy currently in development should help to inform these considerations.

The lack of certainty in respect of the sports lighting is far from ideal and we consider the benefits to sport from the AGP developments are reduced as a result. Temporary; portable lighting cannot be secured as part of the planning process. Their use is likely to restrict the potential use of the facilities for university and community matches and serious training during the winter months and/or evenings.

The proposal will compromise the ability to bring the 3rd cricket square back into use at a future point in time if required. However, we note that there has been investment into the remaining 2no. natural turf squares to provide NTPs as a result of taking the 3rd square out of use and these benefit from secure albeit time limited community use agreements. We would like these community benefits secured in perpetuity through their inclusion in a community use agreement. The option to bring the 'Island site' square back into use also remains if required.

Noting the significant use of the site by the community is varied and includes a range of matches/training/camps/programmes etc across the range of pitches and facilities, Sport England considers that a community use agreement is justified. We would therefore ask for this agreement to be secured by condition.

Given there is still some uncertainty about the specification and design of the AGPs and their compliance with governing body guidance/standards, we would also ask for a condition which requires more details to be submitted. This will ensure the potential for community use is maximised and that it can support matchplay.

Should these conditions be acceptable then Sport England considers that the application is on balance capable of meeting our E5 exception and we are content to withdraw our objection. This states:

'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.'

This is subject to the following conditions being attached should the local planning authority be minded to approve the application:

- Use of the Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) shall not commence until a community use agreement prepared in consultation with Sport England has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, and a copy of the completed approved agreement has been provided to the Local Planning Authority. The agreement shall apply to all the AGPs and the playing field (including cricket pitches and natural turf sports pitches) as well as associated ancillary provision and include details of pricing policy, hours of use, access by non-educational establishment users, management responsibilities and a mechanism for review. The development shall not be used otherwise than in strict compliance with the approved agreement.

*Reason: To secure well managed safe community access to the sports facility/facilities, to ensure sufficient benefit to the development of sport and to accord with Development Plan Policy **.*

Informative: Guidance on preparing Community Use Agreements is available from Sport England. <http://www.sportengland.org/planningapplications/> For artificial grass pitches it is recommended that you seek guidance from the Football Association/England Hockey/Rugby Football Union on pitch construction when determining the community use hours the artificial pitch can accommodate.

- Prior to any above ground works in construction of the Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) details of the design and layout of the AGPs and their compliance with:
 - RFU guidance note 7: Artificial Rugby Turf in order to achieve and maintain World Rugby Regulation 22; and
 - FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf - FIFA Quality or International Match Standard (IMS) as a minimum

must be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority after consultation with Sport England. The AGPs shall not be constructed other than in accordance with the approved details.

*Reason: To ensure the development is fit for purpose and sustainable and to accord with Development Plan Policy **.*

Informative (artificial grass pitches – rugby only). The applicant is advised that the pitch should be built in accordance with RFU guidance note 7: Artificial Rugby Turf and tested bi-annually by an accredited testing laboratory in order to achieve and maintain World Rugby Regulation 22.

Informative (artificial grass pitches – football only). The applicant is advised that the pitch should be tested in accordance with The FA standard code of rules and be registered on the FA Register for 3G Football Turf Pitches.

Informative (artificial grass pitches football only) – The applicant is advised that for any football match play to take place the pitch should be built in accordance with FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf - FIFA Quality or International Match Standard (IMS) as a minimum.

We are happy to enter into dialogue about the precise wording of these conditions if helpful. But without these conditions or a variation of them, we would not consider the application is capable of meeting our E5 exception and we would wish to raise an objection to the application.

Best wishes,

Owen Neal

Planning Manager

I am currently experiencing a high workload and may not be able to reply straight away. Please bear with me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

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