

F/22/93194 The Ageas Bowl

Erection of 172 dwellings, a 71-bedroom care home (Use Class C2), a 142-bedroom hotel (Use Class C1), a well-being centre (Use Class E / F2), improvements to existing stadium, new vehicular access, car parking, pedestrian circulation, together with associated tree planting, landscaping, SuDS and biodiversity enhancements

Planning Policy comments 10/01/2024

Policy background

The Eastleigh Borough Local Plan 2016-2036 was adopted in April 2022 and forms the planning policy framework for the borough up to 2036. It includes policy WE4 on development at Ageas Bowl and Tennis Centre. This clarifies the general criteria for development and the type of development appropriate in the parts of the site within and outside the urban edge. Within the urban area, the Council's policy map identifies an area suitable for residential development in the north west corner.

Policy WE4 provides criteria to support the site's role as a leisure and sporting led venue. It does not include information on the quantum of development. It should be read alongside other Local Plan policies which provide the detailed policies by topic and address specific requirements such as affordable housing (policy DM28), older peoples housing (DM25), parking (DM14) and community, leisure and cultural facilities (DM36).

Since the last Policy response provided, the Government has published a revised National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023). Its revisions include changes to the five-year housing land supply requirement and on older people housing needs. In accordance with the revised NPPF, there is no longer a requirement to maintain a five-year housing land supply as the Council has an up-to-date Local Plan and was able to demonstrate at least five years housing supply when the plan was adopted in April 2022. The tilted balance will therefore not apply to developments in the borough (NPPF paragraph 76).

The revised NPPF includes more detail on establishing the housing requirements of older people (paragraph 63). Specific reference has been added to the housing needs of older people who require 'retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes'. In addition, the NPPF now includes an overall aim to meet as much of an area's identified housing need as possible with a mix of housing types (NPPF paragraph 60). The Planning Practice Guidance on assessing applications for specialist housing for older people is unchanged. It continues to advise that location and viability should be considered when assessing applications and local authorities should take a positive approach to schemes that propose to address identified unmet need (Paragraph: 016 Reference ID: 63-016-20190626).

Proposal

Residential led area to the north west

Criteria 1d in policy WE4 addresses development within the urban edge. Criterion 1d.i. requires that “development creates a high quality of design and takes the form of distinctive individual buildings each set within an open and high quality landscape setting; the extent of development and the boundary treatment of that development (built design and landscape) creates a high quality, distinctive, green and open setting to the Ageas Bowl.”

In the Planning Policy comments on the pre-application and previous proposals, objections were raised on two issues – as the scheme did not create individual buildings each set within an open landscape setting and the impact on the green and open setting to the Ageas Bowl. It was suggested that these aspects of the scheme need to be reworked and led by a high quality landscape and design approach. The reduction in the quantum of development and changes to open space and public realm have largely addressed these issues. However, we would support the detailed comments submitted by colleagues in Urban Design and Landscape, in particular about the impact of the apartment car parking courts. While the relocation of the car parking from between the apartments blocks and Marshall Drive improves the setting of the Ageas Bowl, the number of spaces provided and the lack of trees within the parking courts provides a poor residents’ outlook in this area.

Residential development is specifically addressed in criterion 1d.ii of policy WE4. This criterion covers the location of residential uses; access to/from West End; and layout and design to ensure an appropriate level of residential amenity.

The policy identifies an area in the north west corner where any residential development should be solely located. The supporting text to policy WE4 in paragraph 6.5.56 explains that this is ‘so that it does not affect the setting of the wider site and connects directly to the existing settlement’. The supporting text also states the potential for impacts on residential amenity and the requirement that any residential development should not compromise the existing function of the Ageas Bowl.

Access to/from residential area

The criterion in 1d.ii relating to the access to/from West End is designed to deliver a direct pedestrian/cyclist route to West End and ensure the new residential development is integrated with existing residential communities. Ideally this would be through the redevelopment of the Pitters site to the north of the residential development. It is recognised that the Pitters site is not currently available for development. However the design retains the potential to deliver vehicle, cycle and pedestrian access if this becomes available in the future.

The revised proposals deliver connectivity improvements for pedestrians and cyclists which are welcomed. The previous responses advised that the proposed connection from Telegraph Road through Telegraph Woods would need to be provided in a way that ensures no adverse impact on the Telegraph Woods SINC while being designed to create a safe and attractive route. While this route is not proposed to be lit due to the impact on Telegraph Woods, the landscape plans provide sufficient details of the route to demonstrate that it meets these criteria.

Care home

Adopted Local Plan policy DM25 provides general support for accommodation suitable for the needs of older people subject to meeting criteria on the sustainability of the location, access to local facilities and integration into the local community. In accordance with WE4 1d.ii, within the Ageas Bowl site, residential uses should be located solely in the north west corner as shown on the Policies Map. Uses within the urban edge outside this area are limited to sports/recreation, leisure, hotel and office/research use.

It is recognised that the Government is encouraging the delivery of older people's housing through changes to national guidance in the NPPF which specifically refers to care homes. We maintain our general support for the provision of a care home on the site, however the changes proposed do not provide the justification requested for its location outside the area identified for residential uses. This proposal is therefore contrary to policy WE4.

Hotel

The proposed hotel is located within the urban edge on land identified as suitable for hotel uses. The Planning Statement reports that the hotel will complement the existing Hilton hotel on the site which derives the majority of its income from the stadium. It reports the amount of income directly associated with existing sports and recreational facilities on site for the last normal trading year (60% in 2019).

Criterion 1e. in policy WE4 requires a sequential test to be undertaken to demonstrate that there are no suitable, available and viable sites in city, town or district centres for hotel, leisure and office uses. Further information was provided on the trading and occupancy levels of the existing hotel and how this relates to cricket matches. This demonstrates the association of the hotel with the Ageas Bowl and, as the proposed hotel is designed to complement this, a sequential test is not required.

Conclusions

Planning Policy welcomes the improvements in the revised proposals, including improvements to connectivity and the public realm, and the additional information provided. The proposals are however contrary to policy WE4 in respect of the location of the care home.

Planning Policy objection.