

SECTION '2' – Applications meriting special consideration

Application No : 13/00766/FULL1

Ward:
West Wickham

Address : Old Beccehamian Rugby Football Club
Sparrows Den Sports Ground
Corkscrew Hill West Wickham BR4 9BB

OS Grid Ref: E: 538747 N: 165216

Applicant : Beccehamian RFC

Objections : YES

Description of Development:

Four 15m high floodlighting columns to "pitch 2"

Key designations:

Areas of Archaeological Significance
Biggin Hill Safeguarding Birds
Biggin Hill Safeguarding Area
Flood Zone 2
Flood Zone 3
Green Belt
London City Airport Safeguarding
London Loop
Local Distributor Roads

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the erection of four 15m high floodlighting columns to pitch 2. The columns will have four floodlights each.

Amended plans were received on 29th May 2013, showing a reduction in the number of floodlighting columns from 6 to 4.

The application includes a Planning and Design Statement, and technical details of the proposed lighting. The Planning and Design Statement makes the following points in support of the application:

- Beccehamian RFC has been established at Sparrows Den since the 1960s and built the current club house on the site
- its membership is one of the largest in Kent and the South East
- as per the conditions of the appeal allowed for the installation of 14 roof-mounted floodlights on the pavilion, the Club operates its floodlights on 2

evenings per week between the hours of 7pm and 10pm, and only in the months from October-April inclusive

- the existing floodlighting, installed in 1999, are out-dated and not fit for purpose, only illuminating 1/6th of a pitch and, as such, this area of the grounds receives an unsustainable level of usage
- the Club has had to move one of their evening training sessions to Bishop Justus CE School every year to accommodate for pitch degradation and provide a full floodlit pitch necessary for complete training
- advances in floodlight technology have increased significantly in recent years. Light colours are more natural and louvers are designed to focus the light with minimum light pollution. The manufacturer has advised that a pitch can be successfully illuminated with minimum impact on neighbour amenity
- pitch 2 is the best position for floodlighting at the Club. It is a sufficient distance from properties on Corkscrew Hill and those on Wood Lodge Lane to minimise any impact on amenity
- it is proposed to operate the floodlights in line with the conditions of the second appeal, but an additional evening is requested every fortnight to allow for alternating minis and juniors to train occasionally mid-week
- it is requested that the Club be allowed to operate these floodlights on 2 evenings per week with an additional 1 evening every fortnight on these evenings only between the hours of 7pm and 10pm in the months from October-April inclusive
- the rising posts of the three rugby pitches currently on the site negate the appearance of the columns on the openness of these playing fields, with the floodlight pitch surrounding by pitch 1 and 3 and amidst an area containing tall vertical elements. It is therefore the Club's opinion that the proposal would appear inconspicuous in the existing landscape

The Statement concludes with the following points:

- the proposed floodlights are of a suitably high standard necessary to minimise any impact on neighbouring amenity while providing much needed facilities for the Club
- the floodlit pitch is surrounded by pitch 1 and 3 and as such is amidst an area containing tall vertical elements
- the Planning Inspector dealing with the retention of the existing floodlights commented that floodlighting for training purposes is appropriate development in the Green Belt especially as the site is designated for playing fields
- the proposal would serve to enhance the quality of facilities for local rugby players and contribute to the economic and social development of the Club to meet the needs of the community
- for these reasons the proposed floodlights would comply with the relevant planning policies and should be looked upon favourably.

A further supporting statement was received on 29th May 2013. This makes the following further points in support of the application:

- the existing floodlit training facilities used at Bishop Justus School are less accessible and no washing or changing facilities are provided as part of the hire
- for the 2013-2014 season, floodlit training at Bishop Justus School will cost £120 per session (an increase of £10 per session from last year), with the running of two sessions per week between 26th August and 30th April costing £7,790 on facilities rental
- the hiring of this facility is currently costing 40% of the membership fees collected, which in conjunction with the cost of renting the Clubhouse and pitches (at Sparrows Den) from the Council means that the majority of club monies are spent on rent
- the Club is already charging comparable membership fees in line with other county clubs, and relies upon the support of its members and the local community to operate successfully
- the Club has been advised that subject to a Sport England grant, the erecting of floodlighting will cost approximately £25,000 to the Club, which is less than 4 years rent at Bishop Justus School, and would firmly establish the Club within the local community
- these are very special circumstances for both the club and the local community, and it is requested that the application is considered favourably as its success would enable a locally established playing field to operate for its full potential for a long established club
- the application is necessary for the provision of adequate training and, with this in mind, the Club has been prepared to reduce the scheme to a four column design
- whilst this will result in a reduced standard in terms of the "continuity of lux levels" across the pitch, it will at least provide sufficient lighting for training purposes, and maintain the long view of the wooded corridor, and would not detract from the experience enjoyed by all users of the site.

Location

The application site is located on the northern side of Addington Road, and comprises around 7.65ha of Green Belt land used by Beccehamian Rugby Football Club (RFC). The site is within an Area of Archaeological Significance and is part of the London Loop (orbital walk route).

Comments from Local Residents

Nearby owners/occupiers were notified of the application. A significant number of representations were received, including comments both in objection and in support.

The main points raised in objection can be summarised as follows:

- large conspicuous encroachment into Green Belt
- unacceptable visual impact of floodlighting and columns
- impact on Green Belt and area of special landscape character
- light pollution

- land is public and only leased to rugby club and will detrimentally affect all users of the park
- floodlights could expand the use of the grounds
- additional impact of noise from vehicles and training
- previous refusal for similar proposal in 1996
- proposal is inappropriate Green Belt development
- floodlighting is not essential to operation of the rugby club
- impact of columns during daytime and lights at night
- proposal will harm openness and visual amenity of Green Belt standing in isolation in open ground, and rising well above the existing tree line
- impact on archaeology
- if permission is granted no evening match fixtures should be permitted
- floodlights will be fixed and permanent feature of landscape even out of season
- will result in urbanising effect on what would otherwise be an unbroken night sky
- no other structures of similar size or light levels in the surrounding areas
- the rugby club do not have exclusive use of Sparrows Den
- car parking is already a problem in surrounding roads, which will be exacerbated by this proposal
- proposal would blur boundary between edge of West Wickham and the Green Belt
- increased noise and disturbance in the evenings
- existing floodlights are adequate for club's training needs
- although lighting technology has improved the proposal will still illuminate a large area of the site
- impact on wildlife
- loss of privacy

The main points raised in support can be summarised as follows:

- will enable training in the evening and improve the club and teams
- will not affect local residents
- existing lighting inadequate and sometimes causes injuries
- floodlights will be used infrequently
- site well away from housing
- positive for community sport
- the club currently pays to use floodlit pitches elsewhere for training and the proposal would save this money
- will benefit youth players and children
- promoting healthy lifestyles
- lack of floodlighting is currently holding the club back
- adjacent car dealership has 24hr floodlighting
- will attract more players to the club and aid retention of senior players who often leave for clubs elsewhere with better facilities

The West Wickham Residents Association object to the application on the basis that it would be detrimental to the open character, appearance and visual amenity

of the area, that light spillage will occur, that it would harm the Green Belt and Area of Special Landscape Character, without any special circumstances that would outweigh the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Comments from Consultees

Environmental Health (pollution) raised no technical objections to the proposed floodlighting (6 column proposal), subject to a condition limiting the use of the floodlighting to 2 evenings per week between the hours of 7pm and 10pm between the months of October and April only. Further comments in respect of the amended 4 column proposal will be provided at the meeting.

Highways raised no objection.

English Heritage (Archaeology) was consulted on the application as the site is within an Area of Archaeological Significance. Any comments received will be reported verbally at the meeting.

Planning Considerations

The main planning policies against which the application should be considered are as follows:

Unitary Development Plan

BE1 Design of New Development
G1 The Green Belt

London Plan

3.19 Sports Facilities
7.8 Heritage Assets and Archaeology
7.15 Reducing Noise and Enhancing Soundscapes
7.16 Green Belt

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also of relevance; Section 9 'Protecting Green Belt land' in particular.

Planning History

There is extensive planning history relating to the site. The following application is considered to be of particular relevance to this proposal:

96/00408 - planning permission refused for 8 x 12m high floodlighting columns (to pitch 2). An appeal against this decision was dismissed, with the Inspector finding that the bright illumination in the middle of the sports ground at night would be visible from a wide area, and more so in the winter months when the trees were without leaves. The Inspector considered the Green Belt at this point to be especially vulnerable, close as it is to the urban area, and found that the added effect of the illuminated floodlights would be to significantly increase the intensity of

light in this area of low ambient light and to extend the urbanised appearance of the area southwards into the Green Belt, reducing its openness.

In addition to the above, planning permission was granted at appeal in 2000 for floodlights on the clubhouse building, following the issuing of an enforcement notice by the Council. The use of these lights is controlled by condition, to be used on 2 evenings per week between the hours of 7pm and 10pm between the months of October and April only. A further condition imposed by the Inspector prevents the use of mobile floodlighting on the site.

Conclusions

The main issues for consideration in this case will be the impact of the proposed floodlighting and supporting columns on the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt and the amenities of residents living near the site in Corkscrew Hill and Wood Lodge Lane. A further consideration is the impact of the proposal on conditions of highway safety.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF advises that the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries is an exception to inappropriate development as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The proposed floodlighting may therefore be considered an appropriate facility to support the outdoor sporting use of the site; however it is necessary to consider whether any actual harm would arise to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt at this open site, both by reason of the supporting columns and the floodlighting itself.

The proposed floodlighting columns will, at 15m in height, result in a degree of visual impact, although in view of the reduced number of columns now proposed (4 in total) and the relatively slender appearance of these structures, it is considered that the open nature of the site will not be significantly compromised, with open views maintained across the site to the south-west and along the wooded corridor. Members will note that planning permission was refused at appeal in 1996 for eight 12m high floodlighting columns to 'pitch 2', with the Inspector finding that the increase in the intensity of light in this area of low ambient light would extend the urbanised appearance of the area into the Green Belt. The proposal currently under consideration is for half the number of floodlighting columns considered by the Inspector, and may therefore result in a less intensive level of illumination with the lighting concentrated at either end of the pitch. In addition, the club is seeking to use the floodlighting on a relatively limited number of occasions, in this case 2 evenings per week (with an additional 1 evening per fortnight) between the hours of 7pm and 10pm in the months from October-April inclusive. In this instance therefore, the degree of harm to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt arising from the illumination will be limited.

In support of the application, the Club has stated that the floodlighting is required to meet their training needs during winter months. Whilst there is a limited level of floodlighting already at the site (mounted to the club house), this only illuminates approximately 1/6th of the pitch with the ground therefore receiving an unsustainable level of usage. The Club currently meets its training needs through

hiring an existing all-weather pitch elsewhere in the Borough (Bishop Justus School) at considerable cost (around 40% of the membership revenue), at a site some distance away from the ground and without changing or washing facilities. The proposal would provide the Club with the training facilities they require at their own ground, the cost of which would, together with a Sport England grant, be covered by the cost of 4 years further rental of the Bishop Justus facility. In this case, it is considered that the benefits which would be afforded to the club would outweigh the limited degree of actual harm to the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt identified, demonstrating the very special circumstances required to allow planning permission to be granted in this case.

With regard to the impact on the amenities of local residents, there will be some limited visual impact arising from the columns themselves although they will be sited a good distance from the nearest dwellings in Corkscrew Hill and Wood Lodge Lane. With regard to the floodlights themselves, Environmental Health have reviewed the technical specification (of the six column proposal) and raised no objections. Clearly the lighting will be visible from neighbouring dwellings although again the separation distances involved are such that direct spillage is not anticipated to be problem. There could be an increase in noise and disturbance experienced by local residents, arising from increased the use of pitch 2 in the winter months as a result of the illumination, although having regard to the limited use of the lights for which approval is sought, and the fact that the Club already benefits from some lighting (mounted on the roof of the club house) it is not considered that this will be significantly detrimental. In light of the above it is not considered that a significant loss of amenity to local residents will arise in this case.

From the technical Highways perspective, no objections have been raised to the proposal, although a condition has been requested to require details of the lighting. The site has existing off-street parking available and it is not anticipated that the proposal will give rise to a significantly greater demand for parking on the site, since it relates to a single pitch and is intended to facilitate training only.

Members will need to carefully consider the acceptability of this application having particular regard to the local representations, however may agree that on balance the proposal would not result in a significant detrimental impact on the amenities of neighbouring residents or conditions of highway safety, and that on balance any limited harm to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt would be outweighed by the benefits for the club and demonstrate the very special circumstances required to allow planning permission to be granted in this instance.

Background papers referred to during production of this report comprise all correspondence on files refs. 96/00408 and 13/00766, excluding exempt information.

RECOMMENDATION: PERMISSION

Subject to the following conditions:

- 1 ACA01 Commencement of development within 3 yrs
 ACA01R A01 Reason 3 years

2 The floodlighting hereby permitted shall not be used other than a maximum of 2 evenings per week with an additional 1 evening per fortnight (no more than 5 evenings in every 2 week period), and on these evenings only between the hours of 7pm and 10pm and only in the months from October to April inclusive, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of the amenities of neighbouring residential properties, and to comply with Policy BE1 of the Unitary Development Plan.

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| 3 | ACJ23 | Details of floodlights |
| | ACJ23R | J23 Reason |
| 4 | ACK01 | Compliance with submitted plan |
| | ACK05R | K05 reason |

Reasons for granting permission:

In granting permission the Local Planning Authority had regard to the following policies:

Unitary Development Plan

- BE1 Design of New Development
- G1 The Green Belt

London Plan

- 3.19 Sports Facilities
- 7.8 Heritage Assets and Archaeology
- 7.15 Reducing Noise and Enhancing Soundscapes
- 7.16 Green Belt

The development is considered to be satisfactory in relation to the following:

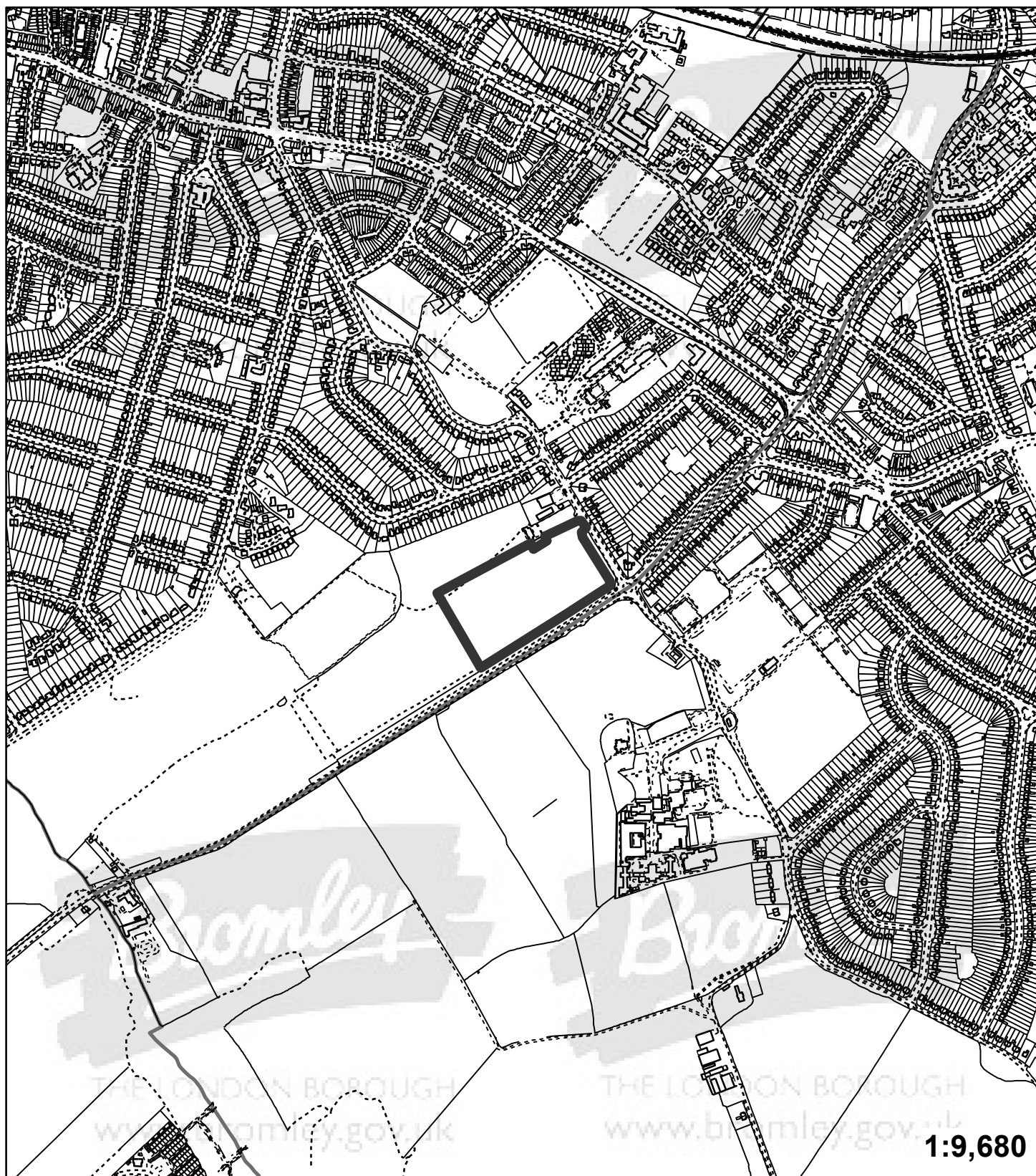
- (a) the impact of the development on the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt and the very special circumstances demonstrated
- (b) the character of the development in the surrounding area
- (c) the impact on the amenities of the occupiers of adjacent and nearby properties
- (d) the community policies of the development plan
- (e) the design policies of the development plan
- (f) the transport policies of the development plan

and having regard to all other matters raised.

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"This plan is provided to identify the location of the site and should not be used to identify the extent of the application site"

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