

70200 Top Park Playing Field

The main ecological issue is mitigation for the loss of moderate area of low ecological value grassland. No other significant ecological issues were identified.

Bats

Buildings and trees on the site were assessed for bat roosting potential. All were assessed as having negligible roosting potential. I have no reason to doubt the findings of the report. I recommend an informative relating to the clubhouse extension along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Whilst the building to be extended has been assessed as negligible risk for bats, the applicant is reminded that under the 2019 Regulations it is an offence to disturb, harm or kill bats. If a bat is found all work should cease immediately and a suitably licensed bat worker employed to assess how best to safeguard the bat(s).

The belt of trees around the site was assessed as having moderate value for bat foraging. The proposed floodlighting could adversely effect the foraging value of the site. However, the main period of use will be October to March, when bats are less active/hibernating and will be turned off at 10pm ie only negatively impact the foraging period for part of the night. Finally an isolux plan has been provided that indicates the illumination levels at the woodland edge will be around 5 lux, which would have minimal adverse effects on most bat species. I am therefore satisfied that for the combination of reasons above the floodlighting is very unlikely to have an adverse effect on local bat populations.

The proposed lighting and timing of the lighting should be conditioned.

Nesting Birds

No trees or shrubs appear to be removed though disturbance, during the extension of the clubhouse is possible. Only limited bird activity was identified on the site. I recommend as a precaution an informative along the following lines is applied to any permission.

The applicant is reminded that, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended it is an offence to remove, damage, or destroy the nest of a wild bird, while the nest is in use or being built. Planning consent does not provide a defence against prosecution under this act. If a birds nest is suspected work should cease immediately and a suitably experienced ecologist employed to assess how best to safeguard the nest(s).

Other Wildlife

The consultant notes that there is a risk of species such as hedgehog and badger crossing the site during construction and coming to harm through entrapment in trenches etc. Whilst accepting this is theoretically correct, the scale and nature of the development is such that there will be minimal deep excavation and the level of risk very low. I am therefore satisfied that all that is reasonable is an informative along the following lines.

The applicant is reminded that, under the Wild Mammal (Protection) Act 1996 it is an offence to inflict unnecessary suffering to wild mammals. Planning consent does not provide a defence against prosecution under this act.

Himalayan Balsam

This species listed under schedule 9 part 2 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) was recorded as abundant in the woodland around the sports pitches. Whilst no work should be occurring in these areas, seed from balsam disperses several meters from the plants and is therefore likely to be present around the edges of the playing field and could be transported off-site during the construction phase. I therefore recommend a condition along the following lines is applied to any permission.

Prior to any earthworks a biosecurity management strategy for himalayan balsam should be supplied to and agreed in writing to the LPA. The agreed method statement shall be adhered to and implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the LPA.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment & Biodiversity Net Gain

Section 174 of the NPPF 2021 states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The development will result in the loss of low ecological value grassland to hardstanding and an artificial pitch. New tree planting is proposed within the wider site as mitigation. There appear to be no adverse effects on wildlife.

A biodiversity baseline has been provided. I accept that this is a reasonable assessment of the value of site. This refers however to a wider area than is actually lost, which I estimate is approximately 0.8 ha of grassland, which would equate to a loss of 1.6 biodiversity units.

24 native trees are proposed. I would regard these as resulting in other broadleaved woodland after 30 years as tightly planted and adjacent to the existing woodland. This would generate approximately 0.24 biodiversity units. I would recommend instead that the proposed 24 heavy standards are planted as landscape trees around the boundary of the site set back from the woodland, so as to result in individual trees. These would generate over 2 biodiversity units if all trees achieved a girth of 30cm dbh after 27 years.

I therefore recommend the landscape proposals are amended to provide 24 individual trees. This is however only a suggestion and they may wish to explore alternative options for fully mitigation on the site in consultation with their ecologist.