

Planning Policy Comments

Application No: 70200

Location: Creation of 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, new macadam hardstanding areas, floodlights, storage container, car park with associated lighting and landscaping, single storey extension to an existing pavilion

Proposal: Top Park playing fields, Bolton Road West, Ramsbottom, Bury, BL0 9NU

The proposal is for the creation of a new 3G pitch, associated works to lighting and landscaping, and a single storey extension to an existing pavilion.

Recreation

The application site forms part of a wider site (Top Park Playing Fields) which is designated as Protected Recreation in the Urban Area RT1/1.

Policy RT1/1 seeks to safeguard the provision of recreation land within the urban area and development will not be allowed where it would result in the loss of outdoor public or private recreation facilities including parks and gardens unless it meets specific criteria.

Whilst similar, the approach in Policy RT1/1 has now been superseded by Paragraph 99(b) of the NPPF which states that “existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b) The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of the quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- c) The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.”

The Bury Playing Pitch Strategy (2019) states that the facility at Top Park currently suffers from subsidence as a result of poor quality drainage and is overplayed because of the high demand for its use. There is currently a limited amount of time to maintain the grass pitch as a result of it being used all year.

The strategy demonstrates that there is a need and demand for the proposed 3G pitch development at Top Park. It also stated that priority areas for the future delivery of 3G pitches should be in the Ramsbottom, Tottington and North Manor areas as there is currently a shortfall of 2 3G pitches for the area.

Therefore, the creation of a new 3G pitch and associated infrastructure will be of sufficient benefit to outweigh the harm resulting from the loss of the playing field and therefore would be in accordance with local and national policy.

River Valley

The site is also designated as River Valley under UDP policy OL5/2. This policy states that, within the River Valleys, new buildings or the change of use of existing buildings or the change of use of land will not be permitted. Exceptions to this are whether the development would not lead to the division of open parts of the valleys into sections and it falls into exceptional criteria as follows:

- a) where the area is designated as Green Belt the established Green Belt policies will
a. apply; or

b) where the area does not form part of the Green Belt, at least one of the following circumstances is met:

- i. that the development represents limited infilling to an established valley settlement or industrial area;
- ii. that it is an extension to, or renewal of an existing industry, where the economic and employment factors are of overriding importance;
- iii. that the development is required in association with an outdoor recreation or appropriate tourist facility;
- iv. that the development is limited and will form part of, and be essential to, the maintenance of the provision and improvement of public services and utilities;
- v. any other development that would be appropriate in a Green Belt.

The development would not lead to the division of open parts of the valley into sections, and it would meet exception criteria b) iii) as it is required to improve the quality of changing room provision and incorporate toilet facilities at a designated recreation site. Therefore, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with policy OL5/2.

Places for Everyone

The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (PfE) is a joint plan covering nine of the ten Greater Manchester districts, including Bury, and is intended to provide the overarching framework to strategically manage growth across the boroughs.

PfE was published in August 2021 and subsequently submitted to the Secretary of State in February 2022. Inspectors have been appointed to carry out an independent examination of the Plan with the hearing sessions commencing in November 2022 and were concluding in July 2023. The examination of the plan is on-going.

Given the advanced stage in the preparation of PfE, it is already considered reasonable that the Plan (as proposed to be modified) should be given weight in the decision-making process in line with paragraph 48 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Consequently, the principle of this application has been considered against PfE (as proposed to be modified).

Policy JP-P7: Sport and Recreation and Policy JP-G6: Urban Green Space are applicable to this proposal. The former states that recreation facilities should be located and designed in relation to housing so as to ensure that they are accessible but also minimise the potential for complaints due to disturbance to residential amenity from recreational activity. The latter states that existing urban open space will be protected and enhanced, and that development should be designed to support the positive use of nearby green spaces, such as by offering a high-quality setting, providing natural surveillance, and facilitating easy access by walking and cycling.

Floodlighting Design Details and a Noise Impact Assessment has been undertaken which demonstrate that the lighting will meet FA recommendations and that the noise impact does not require mitigation.

Policy JP-G3: River Valleys and Waterways reiterates the requirements of UDP Policy OL5/2, expecting decisions to avoid the fragmentation of river valleys.

Therefore, the principle of the proposal is considered to be in accordance with policies JP-P7, JP-G3, and JP-G6 of PfE.

Officer: SB
Date: 23.11.2023