

GMEU response

Summary

I recommend a bat assessment of the building proposed for demolition prior to determination and a commitment to provide a biodiversity mitigation plan for loss of low value grassland.

Bats

The development appears to result in the demolition of the existing building on the site, a potential bat roosting habitat. Species such as common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) most commonly occur in buildings and prefer confined roost sites, such as soffit boxes, eaves or under hanging tiles. The most common roosts are found between underfelt and boards or tiles, and inside cavity walls. Whilst this building is generally low risk there is clearly soffits and barge boards that bats could potentially utilise and therefore roosting by bats cannot be totally ruled out without an assessment by a suitably experienced consultant. Current guidance states it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development is established before the planning permission is granted otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision (UK Government Guidance within the ODPM Government Circular 06/2005). I therefore recommend that:

Prior to determination a bat assessment is carried out by a suitably experienced bat worker. The assessment should include as a minimum a visual inspection of the existing roof space for evidence of bats and exterior of the building for potential bat access points. Should the property be assessed as more than low risk, further information will be required prior to determination.

The proposed floodlighting could also negatively impact on bats, however I am satisfied that the existing playing field is very unlikely to be of importance to bats and that no further information or measures re. external lighting is required.

Nesting Birds

The only potential bird nesting habitat is the building proposed for demolition. This is low risk but could be theoretically utilised by species such as house sparrow. As part of the bat assessment I would expect information on any evidence of birds utilising the building to be provided. If present then demolition would need to occur outside the bird nesting season.

Contributing to and Enhancing the Natural Environment

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 an overall loss of amenity grassland a low value habitat to an artificial pitch and additional car parking, negligible value habitats. Therefore, whilst the loss is of a low value habitat, without mitigation the development would still be contrary to current guidance. I have dealt with a similar application in at Hough End Playing Fields, Chorlton 132513/VO/2021 where MCC did carry out a full ecological assessment up front and have provided a defra metric and biodiversity enhancement plan. Whilst this was in part due to complaints from the public of the loss of green space, the principle of mitigation was accepted.

I do not believe that a biodiversity metric is however required for this site (though it would have been once net gain becomes mandatory), but mitigation proposals should be put forward. Given the land available ie the land sloping away from the pitches, this should be achievable on-site, through management of this land as wildflower meadow or tree planting as examples, alternatively off-site

measures at Red Bank Lodges could occur. ***Prior to determination all that I would except is a commitment to provide mitigation, with the details provided via condition.***