

Erection of additional tennis court floodlights and the enlargement of an existing bin store to accommodate existing bins and a storage container enclosed/screened by wooden fencing to match the existing at Holcombe Brook Sports and Tennis Club, Hazel Hall Lane, Ramsbottom, Bury, BL0 9FS.

Planning Statement



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The proposed development

Enlarged external storage area

The application is for the enlargement of an existing bin store, currently surrounded by close boarded wooden fencing, to include an equipment storage container and the existing bins and for the erection of floodlighting for courts 7, 8 and 9.



Existing bin store to be enlarged.

The proposal is to extend the existing bin store for existing bins and for the storage of a container. The secure container would store sports equipment and machinery for the maintenance and upkeep of the tennis club (e.g., cleaning courts, cutting grass etc).

It is proposed to store large external cleaning equipment, floor and court cleaners, outdoor furniture associated with the tennis facility, ride on lawn mower and garden maintenance equipment. This could not reasonably be stored inside due to size and cleanliness. Other equipment such as chairs etc are currently stored outside and the club require secure storage, particularly over winter. Some outside furniture was recently stolen and so a secure and accessible storage facility is needed.

The existing internal storage areas are now full given the popularity and growth of the club in recent years and include sporting equipment such as various free standing and to be fixed nets, balls and training equipment (for inside and outside sporting activities run by coaches and/ or members) coupled with several table tennis tables for the indoor sports hall.

The proposal would meet additional storage requirements for the club but in a manner where the container is screened from view within a marginally larger but in keeping bin store. All bins would be stored within the storage area.

The fencing for the amended bin store would be as per the existing in terms of its appearance/design though its height would be increased by about 0.75 of a metre (see plans). It would therefore fully screen the container and bins from public view.

Additional floodlighting

When planning permission was approved on 2 March 2011 for the construction of 8 tennis courts (6 with floodlighting), club house, associated car parking, multi-tennis area with practice wall and landscaping (planning application ref 53247), it was on the basis that the floodlights were not illuminated after 22:00 hours.

In 2011, not all courts were to be floodlit because of a lack of funding. The application is now for the inclusion of floodlights on the final three courts as per the details shown on the submitted plans. In addition, and for clarity, 8 new columns (height same as existing, i.e., 10 metre high columns) are proposed as shown on the submitted plan. Consequently, each court would be lit by four floodlights, one in each corner.

Existing columns 1 & 2 would carry two lights, as would the new columns between courts 8 & 9. The other columns would have one light each directed towards the centre of each court.

The proposed floodlights would be to the same specification, height appearance and illumination as shown within the accompanying lighting document, i.e., that considered and approved under application 53247.



Photo of existing floodlights taken from court No. 7 with no floodlights



Photo of courts 7,8 and 9 currently without floodlights

Membership of the club has increased significantly in recent years, placing greater demand on the courts. At certain times of the year (autumn and winter) some of the courts cannot be used because they are not floodlit. This is having an adverse impact on coaching and social tennis activities.

The application site is in the Green Belt.

The Main Issues

The main issues are (i) whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, having regard to relevant development plan policies, the Framework and the effect of the proposal on the openness of the Green Belt; (ii) the effect of the development upon the character and appearance of the area, (iii) the effect upon residential amenities of adjoining occupiers by reason of light pollution and (iv) whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations so as to amount to very special circumstances required to justify the proposal.

Whether inappropriate development

Policy OL1 of the Unitary Development Plan 1997 (UDP) aims to maintain the Green Belt, ensuring that it checks the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, prevents neighbouring towns from merging into one another, safeguards the countryside from further encroachment, preserves the setting and special character of historic towns and assists in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (the Framework) notes that 'a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt'.

One may take the view that the proposed floodlights are an engineering operation. If so, then they would be slender structures seen in the context of the existing floodlights. On any reasonable and objective basis, it could not be said that they would not 'preserve' the openness of the Green Belt or conflict with any of the purposes of the Green Belt.

To the passer-by there would be no discernible difference to the openness of the Green Belt in the context of the juxtaposed tennis courts and existing floodlights. Consequently, and, in this regard, the floodlights would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and there would be no conflict with paragraph 150 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

One may, on the other hand, take the view that the floodlights amount to structures and hence are buildings. If this were the view taken by the local planning authority, then, for the same reasons as above, there would be no conflict with paragraph 149 (b) of the Framework which states that one of the exceptions to inappropriate development is *'the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it'*.

In respect of the extended bin store area and siting of the screened container, this would not amount to any material or significant change to the existing pattern of development to the side of the main building and in the corner of the car park. Given the close relationship

with the main building, one may take the view that this development is akin to an extension of the existing building. If that is so, then clearly it would not amount to a disproportionate addition to the existing building and hence would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the in the context of paragraph 149 (c) of the Framework.

One may take the view, however, that the proposal would amount to an appropriate facility for outdoor sport. If so, the container would not be visible from public view and the enlargement of the existing enclosure would not be significant in scale / appearance terms. Consequently, this development would '*preserve*' the openness of the Green Belt with reference to paragraph 149 (b) of the Framework.

One may also take the view that paragraph 149 (f) is relevant which makes an exception for the limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development. The appeal site is previously developed, and the proposal would be minor in scale and massing and would not therefore have a greater impact on the development than the existing development. Greater impact does not mean no development at all.

Whatever category of development is relevant, I find that the proposals would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No harm would be caused to the openness of the Green Belt or to any of the purposes of the Green Belt. There would be no conflict with the Green Belt requirements of the Framework, policy OL1/2 of the Bury Unitary Development Plan 1997 or the Council's SPD 8 (New Buildings and Associated Development in the Green Belt) 2007.

While the bin store already exists, it is not always used and often bins are stored outside in the open. It would be possible to continue with this arrangement and to place the storage container in the bin store. However, the proposal is to enlarge the existing bin store slightly to accommodate the storage container as well as the bins. This would be beneficial in so far as keeping all bins and storage facilities in one contained area and screened by fencing that is similar in design and appearance to that already existing and approved.

Overall, the proposal would result in a very minor addition to development (including additional floodlighting columns) which would have no significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt or upon its purposes. As the site is already developed, it would have no significant effect upon any encroachment into the countryside or lead to any coalescence of urban areas.

For the above reasons, the proposed development would not be inappropriate in the Green Belt and would accord with policy OL1 of the UDP, with the Council's SPD 8 (New Buildings and Associated Development in the Green Belt) 2007 and with the Framework.

Character and appearance

The enlarged bin store would not be dissimilar to what exists now. The container would not be visible to those that use the car park or indeed the adjacent lane or Longsight Road. The container size would be 2440 mm (w) x 2590 mm (H) x 6100 mm (L). The existing wooden enclosure is 1.85 metres high. This would be increased to 2.60 metres in height so that both the bins and the container would be totally screened from view (see plans). On any reasonable and objective basis such an increase would not be significant in visual terms. In addition, the footprint of the enclosure would be enlarged marginally to accommodate the bins and container (see plans).

While a bin enclosure has been approved already in the same location it is not always used for the storage of bins. Sometimes the bins are stored in the car park and there are no current controls in place relating to where bins are to be stored. This application offers the opportunity to ensure that bins are stored within the designated bin store and hence there would be associated benefits to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt in this regard.

The fencing around the storage enclosure would match the existing in terms of appearance and design. It would be retained permanently. A condition could be imposed on this basis. No harm would be caused to the character and appearance of this rural area as the proposal would not be significant in scale terms. The storage enclosure would continue to be set back from the lane and screened in part by vegetation and hedgerow along this route.

The floodlights would be seen in the context of the existing floodlights. They would be very closely aligned to them and when all floodlights were turned on there would be negligible difference between what exists now and what is proposed in terms of the way that the environment is experienced from surrounding lanes, footpaths and nearby properties.

Residential amenities - light pollution

There are significant separation distances (including intervening fields) between the courts that are proposed to be floodlit and the nearest residential properties such that there would be no material harm caused to the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties in terms of glare or light pollution.



Proximity to nearest surrounding properties

The floodlights would be directed downwards and inwards over the courts and as per the specification that has previously been approved by the LPA (see details accompanying the application). This is a matter that could be controlled by condition including that there is no illumination after 22.00 hrs. In the context of the courts that are already illuminated, the proposal would not represent a material change.

Very special circumstances

As detailed above, the development would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would clearly be surprising if the LPA did not agree to this finding but should

that not be the case then it is considered that there are a number of very special circumstances which would outweigh the any perceived harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. These are as follows: -

- The grant of planning permission would support a growing tennis membership and ensure that the club remains competitive and viable going forward.
- It would enable more people to play tennis for longer periods of time.
- It would assist the various coaches in terms of ensuring that more floodlit courts are available and hence would have some economic benefits.
- It would ensure that required equipment could be stored for sporting and maintenance activities (e.g., mower, power cleaning equipment etc) and without having to extend the building (please note that the tennis club does not have the funds to extend the building).
- It would encourage more sport to be played thereby promoting greater health, fitness and wellbeing for the residents of Bury. In this regard, there would be direct accordance with paragraph 92 (c) of the Framework which states that planning decisions should *'enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling'*.
- The tennis club needs to be as attractive as possible for existing and future members, particularly in the winter and autumn months when the weather is inclement, as it has to compete with indoor tennis facilities in other administrative areas such as Bolton (e.g., David Lloyd and Bolton Arena) and Preston (South Ribble Tennis Centre). More people playing tennis locally means less travel further afield and hence there would be environmental sustainability benefits arising from the approval of planning permission.
- Approving the development would provide an opportunity to improve the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt in terms of controlling the storage of bins in the enclosure only.

Conclusion

The proposals would not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. No harm would be caused to the purposes of the Green Belt, to the character and appearance of the area or to the living conditions of the occupiers of nearby properties. There are several very special circumstances to consider that would justify the grant of planning permission. The tennis club is content with a condition relating to the hours of use of the floodlights as was the case for the original planning permission. The club is also content with a condition requiring the bin enclosure to be maintained and retained as shown on the submitted plans and for the container to be only positioned within such an enclosure.