

REPORT SUMMARY

REFERENCE NUMBER: 24/502042/FULL		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL: Erection of a club house with decking area, 1no. 50 person covered seating stand and 1no. 50 person covered standing area, including repositioning of existing 50 person covered standing area and ticket booth.		
ADDRESS: Jubilee Playing Fields, Headcorn Road, Staplehurst, Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 0BU		
RECOMMENDATION: Pending S106		
SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION: The proposed development is within the countryside, however, it is in accordance with the development plan in the round and specifically responds to Staplehurst Neighborhood Plan ambitions to enhance facilities within Jubilee Field. The proposal is compatible with the existing use of the site and although it is within the countryside it would not cause any demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, it would not harm the amenities of existing residents or cause adverse impacts to highways and transportation and includes the necessary policy compliant uplifts to biodiversity net gain.		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE: Councillor Riordan has requested for application to be considered by Planning Committee. This request is made for the reasons outlined in the consultation section below.		
WARD: Staplehurst	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL: Staplehurst	APPLICANT: Nicola Stonebridge AGENT: Robert Shreeve Associates Ltd
CASE OFFICER: Sean Scott	VALIDATION DATE: 25/06/24	DECISION DUE DATE: 20/08/24
ADVERTISED AS A DEPARTURE: No		

Relevant Planning History

24/502740/FULL - Creation of a 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights and access footpath - Pending Consideration

18/505747/FULL - Football pitch improvements including floodlighting, fencing, seated stand and covered terrace - Approved 05.04.2019

08/2111 - Erection of a building to provide new changing facilities for sports field to replace two existing temporary buildings - Approved 23.01.2009

00/0225 - Creation of fenced, multi-purpose sports area lit by 6no. 8m high floodlights, as shown on Site Location Plan - Approved 06.09.2000

94/1759 - Creation of a fenced multi purpose sports area lit by 4 x 8m high floodlights - Approved 24.02.1995

86/0530 - Sports hall, Sports changing facilities and Guide Centre as validated on 25/4/86 - Approved 03.07.1986

75/0781 - Playing fields - Approved 04.08.1975

MAIN REPORT

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

- 1.01 The site is located within Jubilee Field and is located approximately 55 metres to the east of the village of Staplehurst, which is categorised as a Rural Service Centre. The site is in the 'countryside' as defined by the Maidstone Borough Local Plan Review (2024). No constraints have been identified on the site, however, an area of Ancient Woodland is located to the north of the site (within 120 metres of the proposed pitch) extending north and east across Sweetlands Lane.
- 1.02 Jubilee Field is an area of open space containing playing fields, a skate park and carparking. In addition, there are two buildings to the south-west of the site which contain premises for the Cathy Lamb Centre (which accommodates the Girl Guides) and another community building which contains a kitchen and changing rooms and this is currently used by the Staplehurst Monarchs Football Club (FC).
- 1.03 The pitch for Staplehurst Monarchs is on the western side of Jubilee Field and it the subject of this application, it is enclosed by fencing of approximately 1.8 metres and contains the stand (western side of the pitch) and associated football paraphernalia.
- 1.04 The site is located between an industrial site (Magnetic Shields) to the west and the open countryside to the north, with Headcorn Road located to the south and east. It is noted how the site becomes more rural in character further to the east with open fields together and tree and hedgerow screening on all sides.
- 1.05 It is noted that there is access to Staplehurst via the pavement on the south-western edge of the site and this allows for access to the west along Headcorn Road. There is no pedestrian access to the east.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.01 It is understood that this application is primarily being sought due to the successful promotion of Staplehurst Monarchs FC (Southern Counties East Football League, Division 1) and its ongoing aspirations for further promotion.
- 2.02 For background, in the 2012/13 season the First Team attained their highest position in local football with a third-place finish in the Kent County League Premier Division. The club progressed to Step 6 in the Football Association's (FA) 'football pyramid' in 2021 with promotion to SCEFL Division 1, and now seek improvements to meet the FA ground grading needs for Step 5. This means adding capacity to make provision for covered (50 person capacity) and seating (50 person capacity) and standing areas for 100 users of the site and in total this application seeks to ensure that 200 spectators would benefit from the covered stand facilities. In addition, it is understood that for FA requirements and health and safety, that catering facilities would be required within the confines of the event. As present those facilities are housed outside of the ticketed event (pitch side) area.
- 2.03 It is highlighted that the existing 50-person covered seated stand will remain in situ to the west of the pitch. The following changes are proposed:
- Erection of a club house with decking area: The building would be approximately 12.15 metres (width) x 4.9 metres (depth) x 2.5 metres in height. The Decking area would extend out from the southern and eastern flanks by 3 metres and would have a height of 0.20 metres. The club house is proposed to contain a food preparation area with serving hatches inside and outside, a main room for seating as well as two toilets.

- A new 50-person covered seating stand measuring approximately 7 metres (length), 2.90 metres (width), 3.3 metres height. To be located to the south of the existing pitch, behind the goal.
- Repositioning of existing 50 person covered standing area measuring approximately 6.3 metres (length) x 2.25 metres (width). The proposed roof is mono pitched, measuring approximately 2.42 metres (lowest part) to 2.6 metres (highest part). This will be moved from the western side of the pitch to the south of the pitch behind the goal.
- A new 50-person covered standing area measuring 6.3 metres (length) x 2.25 metres (width). The proposed roof is mono pitched, measuring approximately 2.42 metres (lowest part) to 2.6 metres (highest part). To be located to the west of the pitch alongside the existing seated stand. This is identical to the existing covered standing area described above.
- Relocated ticket booth measuring 2.4 metres (length) x 1.25 metres (width) x 2.5 metres (height). The existing booth is located to the south, of the pitch in front of existing buildings. The new location would be behind those buildings, immediately south of the pitch.

3. POLICY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Maidstone Local Plan Review (2024): Policies LPRSS1, LPRSP9, LPRSP12; LPRSP14(A); LPRSP14(C); LPRSP15; LPRTRA2; LPRTRA4; LPRINF2; LPRINF3; & LPRQD4.

Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan (2016): Policies PW1; PW2; & C5.

Kent Waste and Minerals Plan (amended 2020)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Supplementary Planning Documents: Maidstone Building for Life 12 (2018)

4. LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

Local Residents:

- 4.01 No representations received objecting to the proposal.
- 4.02 Six representations have been received in support of the application for the following (summarised) reasons:
- Supportive of enhancements to the existing football facility.
 - Highlights the benefits of a dedicated clubhouse and how it would be a much-needed space for the community.
 - Supportive of the creation of a hub for the local community and local junior and senior football clubs.
 - Notes the size of the proposal is small in relation to the overall size of Jubilee Field and retention of biodiversity of the surroundings.
 - Proposed scale and location of proposals alongside the football pitch are appropriate/acceptable.

Staplehurst Parish Council

- 4.03 Approval recommended, and the Parish note the enhancement to the existing football facility at Jubilee field will be excellent for the community as well as football supporters (home and away) on a match day, a fantastic opportunity

for all junior teams players and spectators (home and away) to benefit from the clubhouse facility on junior match days and would provide a rest and refreshment option for dog walkers and recreational users of Jubilee field at other times. In addition, the Parish note that the site is small in comparison to the entirety of the jubilee field and steps and biodiversity benefits. However, the following comments (in summary) are made:

1. Disability – disabled toilet welcomed in the clubhouse but still lacks detail on disabled access, especially on the decking [**Officer Comment:** It appears that access into the ground would be at grade. The applicant has provided details of level access to the club house in addition a condition for further details of the decked area is recommended to be secured by condition].
2. Car parking - Supportive of KCC Highways comments regarding the need for a Transport Assessment if private hires are taking place. Also raises concerns that the car park is near capacity (photographs submitted showing cars parked on Headcorn Road and around Great Threads). The clubhouse will increase usage of the site, is a car parking assessment report required to clarify if additional car parking is needed.
3. Drainage concerns – soakaway mentioned but a lack of detail. Run-off into nearby culvert to River Beult of concern. Also, foul water disposal is a concern. Highlights the Questions raised about the consultations made (**Officer Comment:** KCC's Drainage Team, the Environment Agency and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board have been consulted).
4. Main pitch Access – south goal does not restrict access for emergency vehicles or maintenance vehicles to the main pitch (**Officer Comment:** Whilst not strictly a planning matter, it would appear that emergency vehicles would be able to reach the grounds, however, planning for emergencies is the responsibility of the Football Club)
5. Buildings - Ensure built as planned without additions (**Officer Comment:** the drawings that accompany the application specify what can be built)

5. CONSULTATIONS

(Please note summaries of consultation responses are set out below and comments are discussed in more detail in appraisal section where necessary)

Councillor Riordan:

5.01 Wishes for the application to be reported to Planning Committee due to the following reasons:

- Parking concerns:
 - Previous planning applications suggested an attendance of 50 spectators when the actual attendance has been an average of 115 spectators. Professional parking reviews have been carried out and they show that there is currently not sufficient parking without adding additional numbers. There is no consideration of these matters. There is no area on the site for additional parking. The application has not taken this matter into consideration.
 - The level of football proposed to be played at the venue would suggest a significant increase in attending spectators from other towns and villages. The Facility is essentially a village recreation ground where football is played, to consider spectators watching

from other towns of large populations bringing 100's of football fans is potentially very dangerous.

Sport England

5.02 No objection

KCC Highways

5.03 No objection.

MBC Environmental Protection Team

5.04 No objection.

KCC Drainage Team

5.05 No objection.

Kent Police – Designing out Crime Officer

5.06 No objection subject to a condition for Secure by design.

KCC Ecology

5.07 No objection subject to condition to secure biodiversity net gain.

6. APPRAISAL

6.01 The key issues are:

- Policy;
- Character and Appearance;
- Residential Amenity;
- Highways, Parking and Transportation;
- Biodiversity and Landscaping; and,
- Other Matters: Flooding and Drainage; Foul Sewage.

Policy

6.02 The site is situated outside of the defined village boundary of Staplehurst so is within the countryside whereby the test is whether 'significant harm' is caused. As the planning history indicates Staplehurst Monarchs FC is an established football club. It is also evident that site has a long-established use as sporting/community facilities within the wider recreation ground. The proposed buildings and structures represent enhancements that are regarded as facilities that are either directly related or ancillary to the existing use. It is noted that the proposal would not make changes to the use of the site. As highlighted above the site is undesignated and there are no specific policy constraints that would conflict with the proposal.

6.03 The site lies in the countryside as per Policy LPRSS1 (Maidstone Borough Spatial Strategy) of the Local Plan Review where it sets out a development hierarchy which generally directs development towards settlements. However, in rural locations the Policy does suggest that exceptions do exist where coalescence can be averted and where multi-functional open spaces can be conserved and enhanced. LPRSP9 (Development in the Countryside) indicates that there are exceptions to development in the countryside where it meets the requirements of other policies in the LPR and will not result in significant harm to the rural character and appearance of the area.

- 6.04 The development plan includes the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) where Policy PW2 highlights that development beyond the village envelope will need to be assessed in terms of the impact of a development upon the visual setting and landscape features. Specific to this site SNP Policy C5 gives strong support to maintain and enhance Jubilee Field, this includes the development of new and improved facilities at the site. Given the location and the use proposed it is considered that the objectives of SNP policies PW2 and C5 be met in the round.
- 6.05 The proposal is therefore considered to align with the Spatial Strategy and is considered to be acceptable in principle, subject to other development plan policy considerations being met.

Character and Appearance

- 6.06 LPR Policy LPRSP15 requires development proposals to create high quality design and specific reference is made to the need for developments to respond positively to, and where possible enhance, the local, natural or historic character of the area. Policy criteria of most relevance to this application specifies that regard should be paid to site coverage, being reflective and respectful to local landscape and the natural character of the area. LPRQD4 relates to design principles in the countryside and seeks high quality design that is sympathetic to existing buildings and the rural context. The Policy requires that new buildings should, where practicable, be located adjacent to existing buildings or be unobtrusively located and well screened by existing or proposed vegetation which reflect the landscape character of the area.
- 6.07 It is the case that three structures (a stand with seating, a stand with standing space and the ticket booth) are already in existence on the site and with the exception of the stand with seating they would be relocated. Notably the ticket booth would be set behind existing buildings, alongside the southern end of the pitch which is in a less prominent location.
- 6.08 As set out in the proposal there would be a new covered seated stand, and a covered standing area. These are identical to the existing seated stand and covered standing area in terms of their form and materiality.
- 6.09 The accompanying Planning Statement shows that the club house, although made up of shipping containers, would be clad in timber. Officers are satisfied that this approach would soften its the appearance. In addition, a decked area is proposed externally.
- 6.10 In terms of their size (as described in the Proposal) and mass, the buildings and structures would not be overbearing and they have been located close to the neighbouring industrial site and the existing buildings on site (the Cathy Lamb centre and existing community building), which follows the requirements of Policy LPRQD4. In addition, the buildings and structures have a strong linkage to the use of this part of the site as a football ground and therefore, they would not appear out of place.
- 6.11 A feature of good design as per Policy LPRSP15 is to ensure that development is accessible, in this instance it is noted that from the carpark to the facilities that there is a relatively flat access (at grade) with hard surfacing. It is also noted that details of ramps to the club house have been provided for the clubhouse and decking area.
- 6.12 Overall, subject to a condition for details of the finish of the proposed new buildings and structures and details of decking, it is considered that the development is of an acceptable design.

Residential Amenity

- 6.13 LPR Policy LPRSP15 seeks to ensure that neighbouring occupiers are not exposed to, excessive noise, overlooking or visual intrusion. Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan Policy PW2 also emphasises the need to consider impacts such as noise.
- 6.14 The proposed development is adjacent to an industrial site to the west and otherwise, surrounding countryside. With some residential, agricultural and commercial buildings to the west. The nearest residential properties are around 160 metres from the site.
- 6.15 The proposal includes stands to allow for covered spectatorship of the games for an established use. The submitted application details indicate that that on average 120 people attend matches. The new facilities would accommodate 100 people under shelter. It is acknowledged that with improved facilities, that there could be additional spectators.
- 6.16 The clubhouse could generate some additional noise and therefore, it is considered reasonable and appropriate to control the operating hours to 2300 hours.
- 6.17 It is noted that the floodlighting is subject to conditions to control its operation as per planning ref. 18/505747/FULL.
- 6.18 Should the application be minded for approval the abovementioned condition is recommended. Overall, the impact on residential amenity is considered to be acceptable.

Highways, Parking and Transportation

- 6.19 Access arrangements to the site are unchanged. It is also the case that car parking provision which sits outside of the red line, is unchanged.
- 6.20 The site is located near to the village boundary and there is a pavement linking to the village. Staplehurst Train Station is also within a 20-minute walking distance of the site. Whilst the site is not directly served by buses, the number 5 bus serves the village (Station Road), and the route runs between Maidstone and Hawkhurst.
- 6.21 KCC Highways and Transportation were consulted and initially objected to the proposals due to the absence of a transport statement. However, the applicant responded to confirm that the proposal will not increase the capacity of the site in terms of spectatorship, instead the proposal seeks to enhance the spectator facilities as required by the Football Association's Ground Grading Guideline. On average it is understood that the Football Club has an average attendance for the last 2 seasons has been approximately 120 people. The Football Club also highlights that and due to the location that local supporters walk and those that drive tend to car share. Furthermore, the Football Club has a car park marshal on site for games where they expect them to be busy, to ensure that no one parks on the road.
- 6.22 It is considered that more attractive facilities could result in an uplift in numbers of people visiting the site on match days. However, when considered in the round, the Football Club would only play matches three times a week, noting that the men's first team match normally plays on Saturdays and attracts more supporters generally (+100). It is considered that that there are suitable walking facilities from the village and should there be any uplift in attendance it is likely to be gradual and not significant. While it is recognised that the club house can be used throughout the week, this is a relatively modest facility and it is considered that the current access and parking arrangements are capable of serving the facility.

- 6.23 Therefore, on balance it is considered that the proposal would be acceptable with respect to highways, parking and transportation.

Biodiversity and Landscaping

- 6.24 The NPPF speaks of the need to minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity. One of the key principles, set out at Para 180 (a) states that “if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused”.
- 6.25 There is no LPR policy concerning non-residential Biodiversity Net Gain and so the decision maker shall take into account ‘other material planning considerations’, namely, the minimum 10% BNG set out in national policy. The national statutory uplifts in biodiversity net gain (BNG) require development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat.
- 6.26 As set out earlier in the report, the buildings and structures would be of a fairly modest scale. It is also evident that the structures are pre-fabricated and they do not have the same level of permanence as buildings that use traditional construction methods. KCC Ecology has commented that due to the limited footprint of the proposal it is satisfied that there is limited potential for protected/notable species and the information is considered to be acceptable.
- 6.27 The submitted details demonstrate that a BNG of +10.69% would be achievable. It is understood that this would be achieved through enhancements to grassland, new wildflower area and tree planting. These measures also have potential to improve the visual amenity of the site.
- 6.28 KCC Ecology has reviewed the application and advises that sufficient information for BNG has been provided to demonstrate that a BNG of over 10% can be achieved on the site. However, the proposed site plan details that the wildflower creation will be created adjacent to the pitch and on the thoroughfare from the entrance to the stands and KCC Ecology question if this is the best place for the wildflower meadow as it may be impacted by site users. Therefore, it was suggested that the BNG area might be better accommodated outside of the site within the blue line area. Whilst the wildflower meadow would be within a prominent area, that protective fencing could be placed around this area to stop people causing damage to this area.
- 6.29 KCC Ecology highlight that habitat creation required as part of BNG needs to be retained for at least 30 years. Should the application be minded for approval, KCC consider that the following condition and head of term should be applied to any decision:
- Conditions: to secure the habitat creation and enhancement measures detailed within the Biodiversity Net Gain Report, in the interests of improving biodiversity as well as protected fencing for the wildflower meadow area.
 - S106 Head of Term: to secure monitoring over a 30 year period, totalling £2500.
- 6.30 Provided the above-mentioned conditions and HOT are secured, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regards to biodiversity and landscaping.

Other Matters

- 6.31 **Flooding and drainage:** The site is in Flood Zone 1 and therefore is regarded by the Environment Agency (EA) to have a 'low probability of flooding'. Representations have raised concerns about drainage and the Council has consulted the County's Flooding and Drainage Team (LLFA) and no objections have been raised. In addition, the EA has been consulted and should a response be received prior to committee, this will be addressed within an Urgent Update report to Planning Committee. Therefore, the proposal is not considered to adversely impact flooding and drainage in or around the site.
- 6.32 **Foul Sewage:** In response to a representation made about the discharge of foul water, the application form confirms that this will be discharged to the mains sewer. Given the small scale of the development, no concerns are raised.

PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 6.33 Due regard has been had to the Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. It is considered that the application proposals would not undermine objectives of the Duty.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.01 The proposed development is in accordance with the development plan in the round, responding to Neighbourhood Plan ambitions to enhance facilities within Jubilee Field. The proposal is compatible with the existing use of the site and would not cause any demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, it would not harm the amenities of existing residents or cause adverse impacts to highways and transportation and includes the necessary policy compliant uplifts to biodiversity net gain. Therefore, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle with regard to the relevant provisions of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, the Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan, the NPPF and all other material considerations such as are relevant. The application is recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

EIA Screening

EIA Development	No
Comments	

8. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT planning permission subject to the following conditions and the prior completion of a legal agreement to secure the heads of terms set out below with delegated authority to the Head of Development Management to be able to settle or amend any necessary Heads of Terms, planning conditions and/or informatives in line with the matters set out in the recommendation and as resolved by the Planning Committee:

HEADS OF TERMS

To secure the on-site biodiversity habitat net gain of at least 10.69% for at least 30 years including a fee of £2500 to cover the costs of the LPA reviewing monitoring reports.

CONDITIONS:

1) Time Limit

The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2) Approved Drawings and Documents

The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

- Site Location Plan – drawing no. 24.14.SP01B
- Block Plan – Proposed – Drawing no. 24.14.BP02H
- Proposed Floor and Roof Plans and Elevations of Proposed Buildings – drawing no. 24.14.PL01C

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3) Materials

The construction of the development hereby approved shall not commence above slab/podium level until written details and virtual samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the buildings and structures hereby permitted have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be constructed using the approved materials.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development.

4) Decking Details

The club house hereby approved shall not be occupied until full details of the decking, including the balustrade and ramped areas have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall be included on floorplans and elevation drawings.

Reason: To ensure sufficient accessibility and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development.

5) Secure by Design

The development hereby permitted shall incorporate measures to minimise the risk of crime. No development above slab level shall take place until details of such measures in line with the principles and physical security requirements of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved measures shall be implemented before the development is occupied and thereafter retained.

Reason: To secure crime prevention and safety of the area.

6) Biodiversity Net Gain (10%)

No development shall take place until a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) for maintaining the minimum 10% onsite biodiversity net gain (submitted and approved through the Biodiversity Gain Plan) for a period of 30 years from completion of the development which shall include:

- I. a non-technical summary;
- II. the roles and responsibilities of the people or organisation(s) delivering the HMMP;

- III. the planned habitat creation and enhancement works to create or improve habitat to achieve the biodiversity net gain in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Gain Plan;
- IV. the management measures to maintain habitat in accordance with the approved Biodiversity Gain Plan for a period of 30 years from the completion of development; and
- V. the monitoring methodology and frequency in respect of the created or enhanced habitat to be submitted to the local planning authority,

The development shall be implemented in full accordance with the requirements of the approved HMMP.

Notice in writing shall be given to the Council when the habitat creation and enhancement works as set out in the HMMP have been completed.

Monitoring reports shall be submitted to local planning authority in writing in accordance with the methodology and frequency specified in the approved HMMP.

Reason: To ensure measurable net gains to biodiversity.

7) Protective Fencing

Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, details of protective fencing to the wildflower meadow area (part of the BNG measures) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The fencing shall be retained thereafter.

Reason to ensure adequate protection in the interest of achieving biodiversity net gain.

8) Operating Hours

The Club House shall not be used outside of the hours of 0800-2300 hours Monday to Sunday.

In the interests of residential amenity.

INFORMATIVES

- 1) Buildings and Structures – fixed locations
- 2) Compliance with guidance of The Institution of Lighting Professionals
- 3) Mid Kent Environmental Code of Development Practice