

APPLICATION: MA/11/1371 Date: 11 August 2011 Received: 7 October 2011

APPLICANT: Mr Terry Casey, Maidstone United FC

LOCATION: LAND AT, JAMES WHATMAN WAY, MAIDSTONE, KENT

PARISH: Maidstone

PROPOSAL: Installation of new 3G (Third Generation) artificial pitch in-lieu of previously proposed natural grass pitch as part of the Maidstone United Football Club development proposals as shown on drawing nos. 014-922-02C, design and Access Statement, Design Criteria for the Construction of a Synthetic Turf Pitch, and Pitch construction specification received 12/08/2011, Flood risk assessment, and drawing no.s 014-922-25A, 28, 29, 103F, 105, 106A received 04/10/2011 and site location plan (014-922-26C) and Certificate B received 07/10/2011

AGENDA DATE: 8th March 2012

CASE OFFICER: Steve Clarke

The recommendation for this application is being reported to Committee for decision because:

- Councillor Harwood has requested it be reported for the reason set out in the report

1. POLICIES

- Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000: ENV6, ENV7, ENV24, ENV35
- South East Plan 2009: SP2, SP3, CC1, CC6, NRM5, S5, S6, BE1, BE6, AOSR7
- Government Policy: PPS1, PPG17

2. HISTORY

2.1 Previous relevant planning history on the site is as follows:

- MA/10/2148: Application for new planning permission to replace extant planning permission in order to extend the time limit for implementing planning permission MA/04/0711 (Erection of a football stadium consisting of a playing pitch, main stand, 2 covered terraces, club house, changing rooms, parking for 82 cars 3 coaches 5 motor-cycles and 10 cycles and associated works: APPROVED 22/09/2011

- MA/04/0711: Erection of a football stadium consisting of a playing pitch, main stand, 2 covered terraces, club house, changing rooms, parking for 82 cars 3 coaches 5 motor-cycles and 10 cycles and associated works: APPROVED 29/03/2006

3. CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 **Environment Agency:** No objections to the principle of the application but advise that the applicant should check the drainage scheme to ascertain if it is still appropriate. The applicant has been advised of this requirement.
- 3.2 **KCC Heritage Conservation:** No objections to the change to the artificial surface. A watching brief is under way on the site and a report should be submitted once groundworks have been completed.
- 3.3 **KCC Biodiversity:** Consider that the change in the surface of the pitch will have no impact on biodiversity.
- 3.4 **Southern Water:** Have provided a plan showing the approximate location of a public sewer that crosses the site and advise that no development should take place within 3m of the centre- line of the sewer on either side.

4. REPRESENTATIONS

- 4.1 **Cllr Harwood** has requested that the application is reported to the Planning Committee for the following reasons:-

'I suggest that this application needs to be tested at committee in light of its controversial nature, which I find difficult to reconcile with relevant facts as I understand them. The aesthetic impact, flood risk implications, run-off dynamics and operational sustainability of this choice of surface, with the barrier it presents to promotion.'

- 4.2 No other representations have been received.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Site Description

- 5.1.1 The application site is located on land between James Whatman Way and the River Medway, to the west of the A229 'Fairmeadow', on the edge of the Town Centre. It was formerly used as a football field by the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- 5.1.2 The western boundary of the site is formed by the River Medway, its towpath and the footpath access to the Kent Messenger Bridge and Whatman Park, the northern boundary borders land within the Springfield Mill complex owned by

Whatman plc. The eastern boundary is steeply banked and rises to James Whatman Way which gives access to the A229 at the Royal Engineers Road/Stacey Street/Fairmeadow roundabout. The southern boundary of the site is bounded by Maidstone Invicta Rowing Club and its compound. The site itself is at a considerably lower level than the highways to the east of the site, approximately 6.5m lower in places. It also rises gently in a northerly direction across the length of the site. The site area amounts to approximately 1.5ha.

- 5.1.3 There is existing planting along the western side of the site bounding the river bank and in its south west corner there are some existing mature trees.
- 5.1.4 The site lies within the defined Urban Area of Maidstone as set out on the Maidstone Borough-wide Local Plan 2000 (MBWLP) Proposals Map. It also forms part of the Riverside Zone of Special Townscape Importance (Policy ENV7 of the MBWLP), it is allocated as Public Open Space (Policy ENV24) and also lies within The Medway Valley (Mill Meadow to Allington Lock) Area of Local Landscape Importance (Policy ENV35).

5.2 Proposal

- 5.2.1 The application seeks permission to change the proposed surface of the football pitch from grass to a 3G (third generation) artificial pitch. This effectively means that the pitch will be of a synthetic nature – with the texture of grass but made of a plastic, rather than of grass.
- 5.2.2 The underlying construction and drainage regime of the pitch is very similar to the previously proposed grass pitch, with a sub base (with no top-soil) onto which the pitch is placed.
- 5.2.3 The applicants have advised that the fibre mat and the sub base has a water permeability equivalent to a rainfall capacity of not less than 3.26 metres of rain water per hour, comfortably in excess of any recorded rainfall events. This requires a sub soil drainage system of 150mm diameter pipes at 10 meters centres. The applicants have advised that design data supplied by their agronomist, Dr Tim Lodge of Agrostis Turf Consultancy, when a natural pitch was being considered recommended a well drained sub-soil drainage system with 80mm diameter pipes at 5 metre centres.
- 5.2.4 The applicants state that both pitch types require a significant sub soil drainage system to prevent pitches becoming water logged and both require high permeability. To prevent excessive surface water run-off it is necessary to install underground drainage for both options and the instigation of attenuation basins at the northern edge of the pitch to allow any excessive sedimentation to settle prior to water discharging into the River Medway. Following Environmental Guidelines and in agreement with the Environment Agency, this is limited to

11litres/sec. Maximum surface water run-off from the proposed pitch whether artificial or natural will be the same as the discharge to the Medway is regulated.

5.2.5 The applicants have also noted that the use of the artificial pitch additionally does not require watering. With a grass pitch sprinkling is required nearly every day and the club would have to abstract water from the Medway calculated at 20m³ per day for this purpose.

5.2.6 The applicants advise that 3G artificial pitches are accepted by the Football Association at the current level that Maidstone United plays league football, (the Rymans League). Should the club be promoted into the Conference League (two promotions would be required) where the current regulations insist on a grass pitch, then the 3G surface can be rolled up, the top of the sub-base re-configured with a sub-soil and the playing surface replaced with a grassed, turf, surface.

5.3 Principle of Development

5.3.1 The principle of development on this site has been established, through the earlier permissions. The pitch/playing area is no bigger with the artificial pitch now proposed than the approved grass pitch. I raise no objections in principle to the provision of an artificial pitch, subject to any other potential implications being acceptable. These are addressed below.

5.4 Visual Impact

5.4.1 The pitch is to remain the same size as previously approved, and the colour of the synthetic pitch will remain of a green colour. From my experience, the pitch may well be a slightly more 'vibrant' green, than grass, however, from medium to long distances, this amendment would have little impact. As such, I am satisfied that the change from a grass pitch to an artificial pitch will not result in any significant change in the visual impact of the development on the character of the site or the area.

5.5 Residential Amenity

5.5.1 The proposed change from grass to an artificial pitch will have no direct impact on residential amenity on the basis of the change of material. However, it will allow for a more intensive, and potentially flexible use, with other groups other than the football club utilising the facility.

5.5.2 As the new residential development on the north side of James Whatman Way adjacent to the new library and archive centre is nearing occupation, I have considered the potential impact on the future occupiers of these properties.

5.5.3 An artificial pitch is likely to be playable with a greater frequency than a grass pitch. This could lead to a greater frequency of activity at the site than if a grass pitch was retained, particularly since the Club has a requirement under the s106 agreement to allow use by the Community. (These details have yet to be finalised as the extent of community use has to be supplied to the Council by 22 September 2012 in accordance with the terms of the s106 agreement).

5.5.4 The flats are located in the Town Centre close to busy highways and would be subject to a degree of noise and disturbance in any event. In addition, a number of such facilities, including that at the YMCA in Loose have previously been permitted, and are successfully run within residential areas. I consider that given this context, the level of increased use, will not be so significant as to warrant or justify refusal on the grounds of increased noise and disturbance.

5.6 Highways

5.6.1 There are no specific highway implications arising from the development. However as stated above, an artificial pitch is likely to be playable with a greater frequency than a grass pitch. The site is however, well related to the highway network and nearby public transport facilities and appropriate measures are in place on the permission to seek to reduce car-borne traffic. Given this, the potential increased activity can in my view be acceptably assimilated.

5.7 Flood risk

5.7.1 The drainage of the pitch is designed to be permeable to enable the dispersion of rainwater and surface water in the same way as a grass pitch. The pitch construction is largely the same although the sub-base is not topped with top-soil as it would be with a grass pitch. As such, it is not considered that there would be any greater flood risk as a result of this proposal.

5.7.2 The discharge from the site to the River Medway via an attenuation pond located to the north of the pitch in the northwest corner of the site is limited, following agreement with the Environment Agency, to 11litres/second. This would also have been the case with a grass pitch.

5.7.3 The Environment Agency have viewed the submitted flood risk assessment and have not raised objections to the development as they consider that the proposal would not be likely to result in any additional flood risk.

5.7.4 I do not consider that the change to the pitch surface would result in any unacceptable potential increase flooding risk.

5.8 Other Matters

5.8.1 There are no implications for biodiversity on the site as a result of the change from a natural to an artificial grass pitch. Kent County Council Biodiversity team have confirmed that this is the case.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The change from a grass to an artificial pitch is considered to be acceptable. There are no adverse flooding implications as discharge into the River Medway is limited to the same rate as would have been the case for a grass pitch.

6.2 I also consider that there would be no adverse impact on biodiversity within the site, or on residential amenity or the local highway network.

6.3 The following recommendation is therefore appropriate.

7. RECOMMENDATION

GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION subject to the following conditions:

1. 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. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
014-922-02C, 014-922-25A, 014-922-28, 014-922-29, 014-922-103F, 014-922-105, 014-922-106A and the Design Criteria for the Construction of a Synthetic Turf Pitch, and Pitch construction specification;

Reason: To ensure the quality of the development is maintained and to prevent harm to the character of the surrounding area in accordance with policy CC6 of the South East Plan 2009.

Informatives set out below

For the avoidance of doubt you are advised that the permission hereby granted only relates to the change from a natural grass to an artificial pitch. Permission is not granted for any other development within the site.

The proposed development, subject to the conditions stated, is considered to comply with the policies of the Development Plan (Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000 and the South East Plan 2009) and there are no overriding material considerations to indicate a refusal of planning consent.