



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 8 November 2022

Site visit made on 7 and 9 November 2022

by Sarah Manchester BSc MSc PhD MIEEnvSc

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 January 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Q4245/W/21/3289557

Clarendon Field (Sales Sports Club), Rookwood, Clarendon Crescent, Sale, M33 2DE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Matthew Whiteley of Sale Sports Club against the decision of Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 102054/FUL/20, dated 25 September 2020, was refused by notice dated 22 June 2021.
 - The development proposed is the creation of a new outdoor artificial hockey turf pitch with associated features, including: perimeter fencing, gated entrances, an artificial floodlight system and improvements to the adjacent natural turf pitch.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have adopted the description of the development from the application form in the banner heading above. However, it is more precisely described in the decision notice and the appeal form as the creation of a new outdoor artificial hockey turf pitch with associated features including perimeter and acoustic fencing (up to 3m in height) with netting to ends of pitch (additional 2m atop fencing), gated entrances, an artificial floodlight system, improvements to the adjacent natural turf pitch, bunds, swales, seating, picnic and play areas and new landscaping. This description more accurately describes the proposal and I have determined the appeal accordingly.
3. Additional information was submitted with the appeal including in relation to landscape and visual issues, noise and lighting. The scheme has also been amended to reduce the height of the lighting columns from 15m to 13m. The Council and interested parties have been provided with the opportunity to comment on the further information and revisions through the appeal process and I am satisfied that no party would be prejudiced by my determination of the appeal based on the information before me.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are the effects of the proposal on:
 - i) the character and appearance of the area;

- ii) the protected open space, with particular regard to the quantity and quality of informal sport and recreational provision and the Public Right of Way; and
- iii) the residential amenity and living conditions of nearby residential occupiers, with particular regard to light, noise and disturbance, and on-street parking.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. Clarendon Field (the Field) is an irregularly shaped area of public open space contained by Clarendon Crescent, Dane Road, Temple Road and Broad Road. It is an extensive area of amenity grassland with football and rugby pitches, goal posts and lighting columns. Part of the boundary around the corner of Clarendon Crescent and along Broad Road is formed by a hedgerow to the rear of the footway. Elsewhere, the Field is largely enclosed by residential boundaries including tall hedges, fences and walls. There are additionally scattered boundary trees. There are several points of entry from the surrounding roads and numerous gates in garden boundaries. A Public Right of Way (the PRow) crosses the site between Clarendon Crescent to the west and Temple Road to the east.
6. The proposed artificial grass pitch (the AGP), roughly 100m x 60m, would be prominently sited towards the centre of the Field. It would be enclosed by 3m high weldmesh fences with similarly tall timber acoustic fences to both ends and part of one side. When used for hockey, 2m high netting would be erected at both ends above the weldmesh fence. The existing 4 10m lighting columns would be removed and replaced by 8 13m tall lighting columns arranged around the AGP to illuminate it and the adjacent grass pitches, including an improved natural grass pitch between the AGP and the Dane Road properties to the north.
7. There would also be an extensive scheme of hard and soft landscaping. Screening bunds up to 2m tall, with retaining duo blocks and drainage swales, would be created at both ends of the AGP and between the improved grass pitch and the northern boundary. The areas around the pitches, including bunds, would be planted with trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Informal grass paths would be mown through the landscaped areas between the boundaries and the bunds and there would be seating and a picnic and natural play area. Access points would be resurfaced and a hard surfaced path would extend from the north western access point to the AGP.
8. The AGP fencing and bunds would create a barrier and effectively divide the Field. The southern part would remain largely open with existing pitches retained, although with boundaries strengthened by planting and a play and picnic area sited to the rear of Broad Road properties. In the northern half of the Field, while the AGP would not be out of keeping in the context of sports pitches, there would nevertheless be a marked visual change. This would be due in part to the noticeable increase in the number and height of lighting columns, the conspicuous tall fences, particularly the solid timber fencing and, by virtue of their height and degree of encroachment into the Field, the landscaped bunds and duo blocks.

9. Viewed from the Broad Road end of the Field, the permeable weld mesh fence would not be overly prominent. However, on the closer approach and from locations elsewhere including the PRoW, the weldmesh and solid timber fences, bunds, duo blocks and lighting columns would be visually obtrusive and incongruous features. The fences and landscaped screening bunds would serve to enclose and subdivide a large part of the Field. From locations in the northern half of the site including the informal paths, the wide uninterrupted views towards Broad Road and across the Field would be obstructed and the visual connection with the surrounding area would be severed. The proposal would not be integrated into its surroundings, rather it would be dominant and unsympathetic to the existing character of the Field.
10. In this regard, the Field is typical of recreation grounds and playing fields and its defining features and its visual amenity value derive from the extensive area of amenity grass with its uninterrupted openness. As such, while the AGP and permeable weldmesh fences might be more readily assimilated, the mitigation bunds and solid fences, swales, duo blocks and screen planting would be incongruous features that would detract from the expansive open and largely undeveloped character of the Field. While greater structural diversity and visual interest may be beneficial in purely landscape and scenic beauty terms, in this case it would erode the established and functional character and appearance of the open space. The proposal would not make a positive contribution to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Notwithstanding the limited public views from surrounding roads, the proposal would be readily visible from within the Field, the PRoW, Broad Road and surrounding properties. It would therefore be capable of eroding the strong contribution that the open space makes to the local townscape.
11. There are other parks in the area with paths through woodland and with a wider range of facilities, including car parks and skate parks. However, while public spaces can and do evolve, the successful integration of new features into visually and functionally different open spaces elsewhere does not provide a justification for the proposed development.
12. The photographs of the AGP at Oakham School Playing Fields illustrate the weldmesh fence does not form a solid barrier and it is relatively unobtrusive viewed from distance. However, that AGP is in a different surrounding context, set back at the edge of a school playing field close to a railway line. It is not prominently sited towards the centre of a public open space, and it does not include solid fences, bunds, swales, duo blocks or screen planting. Even if it had not been considered in a different policy context, it is not directly comparable to the appeal proposal. Neither it, nor the photographs of timber fencing and bunds, provide a justification for the proposal.
13. As part of a pre-application consultation in 2018, the Council advised that the proposed fencing would be relatively prominent and it would create a physical barrier to views, but it would be appropriate in context and it was not likely to result in significant adverse impacts on visual amenity or character and appearance, and appropriate planting would help integrate the fence with its surroundings. However, the appeal scheme has been amended since that time. Irrespective, pre-application advice is not binding and it cannot pre-empt the democratic decision-making process.

14. The landscape and visual appraisal (the LVA) has been prepared by a qualified and experienced landscape professional, in accordance with established guidelines. However, the guidelines¹ set out that much of the assessment must rely upon qualitative judgements about the effects of proposals and that even qualified and experienced professionals can reach different judgements. The Council was entitled not to accept the conclusions of the landscape professional but instead to make its own assessment, taking into account the LVA, its own observations and the representations of interested parties.
15. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would harm the established open character and appearance of Clarendon Field. While the formal sports provision would be high quality design, the proposal as whole would conflict with Policy L7 of the Trafford Local Plan: Core Strategy Adopted January 2012 (the LP) in relation to development being appropriate in its context and protecting and enhancing the character of the area. It would conflict with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) that require development to be sympathetic to local character, including the built environment and landscape setting, and to establish or maintain a strong sense of place.

Protected open space

16. Clarendon Field comprises a large area of amenity grass with established football and rugby pitches. It is owned by the Council but leased by Sale Sports Club, which has its main site to the west of Clarendon Crescent. The Field is designated as Protected Open Space in the Trafford Unitary Development Plan Adopted June 2006.
17. LP Policy R5 aims to protect and improve the quality of open space, sport and recreation facilities. The supporting text explains that an unacceptable loss of open space, sport or recreation facilities would be a loss in quantity which could not be replaced with an area of equivalent or better quality in a suitable location to meet demand. This is consistent with the Framework which states that existing open space, including playing fields, should not be built on unless it is demonstrably surplus to requirements, or the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
18. The Trafford Greenspace Strategy 2010 identifies Clarendon Field as recreation grounds/ sports pitches, which are generally large playing fields of less varied landscape character where the primary designated function is formal sport but they often include play areas and space for informal recreation. In this case, there is no dispute that formal sports take precedence over informal recreation on the football and rugby pitches. However, not all of the Field is marked out for pitches, the pitches are not continuously used and there is unrestricted public access to the Field.
19. The existing pitches are available for use at all times, but use is limited between November and March by waterlogging and by the restrictions on the operation of the floodlighting for training purposes to 3 evenings each week between 1800-2100. Even so, large numbers of adults and juniors participate in formal sport for both training and matches. In this regard, the use of the

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013), Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment

Field for formal sport, and the numbers of people participating in it, are well understood. Conversely, there has been no rigorous assessment of the informal use of the Field. Consequently, its level of use and its value to different groups and individuals in the community, including people with disabilities who may not be able to join the sports club irrespective of its inclusivity aims, has not been quantified or qualified.

20. I visited the appeal site in the evening and on a weekday morning in November. In the evening, when the pitches were floodlit and in use, informal use was focussed on the southern part of the Field and along the PRoW. In the morning, in the absence of formal sport, activity was greatest in the northern half of the field in the peripheral zone around the pitches. While I saw predominantly dog walkers, the evidence indicates that, in addition to being a popular dog walking destination, the Field is also used for walking, running, exercise classes and boot camps, picnics and socialising, informal ball games and children's play. Its informal recreational use value derives in part from its size and openness and the relatively low formal use. I understand that for much of the time, it provides a spacious and comparatively peaceful space in an otherwise densely developed urban area.
21. The site has been historically and it continues to be well-used and valued both for formal sport by Sale Sports Club and for informal recreation by the local community. Irrespective of the relative numbers of people, the current restrictions and limitations on the use of the pitches achieve a balance whereby formal and informal uses can comfortably coexist. Moreover, irrespective of the typology in the Green Space Strategy and that its primary function may be for formal sports, Clarendon Field is designated as protected open space for the purposes of planning policy. On the basis of the evidence, I am satisfied that the Field meets the Framework definition of open space, this being all open space of public value which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity. It is therefore appropriate to consider the effect of the proposal on all of the functions of the open space.
22. The proposed increase in the number of pitches would increase the area available for formal sports. The AGP would be an all weather pitch suitable for year round use and it would diversify the types of sports that could be played, including hockey, tennis and netball. The improved grass pitch would sustain greater use than the existing frequently waterlogged pitch. The floodlighting would illuminate an increased number of pitches for more of the time, thereby allowing an increase in the formal sporting use of the site. Therefore, the proposal would result in significant enhancement of the formal sports provision at Clarendon Field.
23. The AGP would occupy and fence out roughly 13% of the Field. At face value, taking into account the large size of the Field and that the natural pitches would continue to be available for informal use when not used for formal sport, the proposal would occupy only a relatively small proportion of the whole. However, the intensification of formal use would reduce the availability of the pitches for informal use. The bunds, swales and screen planting would result in the further loss of functional recreational space including areas currently available when the pitches are in use. Surface improvements to entrance points would improve access into the Field but the informal mown grass paths would be a reduction in terms of accessibility and functionality compared to the existing unrestricted and extensive amenity grassland. There would be a

- significant reduction in functional and accessible areas for informal recreation, both in terms of extent and duration.
24. The AGP, fencing, landscaped bunds and swales, duo blocks and lighting columns with their floodlighting arrays would be prominent and conspicuous features. The cumulative visual intrusion and increased enclosure would be detrimental to the experience of informal recreational users. This is because the informal use value of the Field derives from its spaciousness, its uninterrupted openness and its unrestricted access. The increased intensity and duration of formal sports would result in the informal and PRow user experience being increasingly dominated by the noise, disturbance and to a lesser degree the lighting arising from formal pitch use. There would be reduced opportunities for quiet contemplative recreational use. The loss of openness and the compartmentalisation of the Field would constrain the functionality of the site and detract from its value, including in terms of visual amenity, for informal users.
25. Greater Manchester Police consider that the fencing would secure the AGP, dense planting on the bunds would prevent loitering, and the albeit limited natural surveillance from surrounding first floor windows would make it unlikely that antisocial behaviour would go unnoticed. However, while it is satisfied that the AGP would not be a target for anti-social behaviour, the advice does not obviously relate to the informal use areas nor take into account the experience or perception of informal users. In this regard, and in contrast to the existing uniformly open situation, the informal paths would be sinuous features largely contained in corridors of varying widths between the bunds and the site peripheries. While these corridors might still be several metres wide at their narrowest, the mown paths would be narrower still. Informal users would have to pass in close proximity to one another and to concealed corners and spaces. The evidence indicates that people including single women, persons with a fear of dogs or dog walkers encountering potentially aggressive dogs would feel disadvantaged by the increased enclosure and reduced visibility. The proposal would not be perceived as an inclusive and safe place for all users.
26. Nearby Worthington Park includes formal pathways through woodland and an area of open amenity grass. The paths appear relatively narrow and secluded and neither they nor the grassed area, which is smaller than Clarendon Field, appear to benefit from natural surveillance from housing. There is little evidence that it performs a similar function to the appeal site. Priory Gardens similarly appears to be a substantially wooded and more secluded site. In this regard, the open space at Clarendon Field, rather than being uninspiring and of little value to the local community, appears to offer additional and valuable recreational opportunities not provided for in nearby open spaces.
27. The proposal would introduce novel facilities including welcome signage, seating, picnic area and natural play area. However, given the evidence in relation to how the Field is used informally, these limited features would not compensate for the loss of extent and functionality of the open space for the informal users. The enhancement of the formal sports provision would be at the expense of the informal recreation use. The proposal would not demonstrably provide equivalent or better informal recreational facilities.
28. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would enhance the quantity and quality of the formal sports provision but overall it would harm the quality of the open

space, with particular regard to its public value and informal recreational use. Consequently, there would be conflict with the aims of LP Policies R5 and L7 and the Place Objectives SA09 and SA016. These require, among other things, that proposals protect and improve the quality and distribution of open space, sport and recreation facilities. It would also conflict with the aims of the Framework in relation to the provision of accessible open spaces that support communities' health and social well-being.

Living conditions and residential amenity

Outlook and visual amenity

29. The bunds would be a similar height to many of the adjoining garden boundaries and their sloping landform would be further softened by planting. While the fencing and lighting columns would be taller, these would be further away and screened in part by boundaries and vegetation. The proposal would not be overbearing or dominant viewed from the rear gardens or ground floor windows of surrounding properties during the day. The proposal would be more readily visible from first floor habitable room windows. Even so, taking into account the distances involved and screen planting, the proposal would not be overbearing nor significantly visually intrusive to the neighbouring dwellings during daylight hours.
30. However, the situation would differ from September until April when the floodlighting was in use. The illumination of the AGP and adjacent grass pitches would create a brightly lit 3 dimensional area roughly 200m x 120m. There is little evidence in relation to whether or not the proposal would result in a greater or lesser extent or intensity of illumination than the existing. However, there would be a significant increase in the frequency and duration of floodlighting, from 1800-2100 3 evenings a week to up until 2100 every weekday and until 1900 on weekends and public holidays not including Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
31. The proposal would not result in unacceptable levels of illumination, light spill or glare to neighbouring habitable room windows, in accordance with the Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance Note 01/20 for the reduction of obtrusive light. However, and while the neighbouring occupiers understand and they accept that the pitches are floodlit for some of the time, the proposal would be materially different to the existing situation whereby the Field is not floodlit on any day until 1800 and then, beyond that time, only for 3 hours on 3 evenings a week. The extensive floodlighting nearly every evening from September to April would be visually intrusive and it would be detrimental to the neighbouring residential occupiers.

Noise and disturbance

32. The Noise Impact Assessment Report (NIA) submitted with the appeal presents the results of a baseline noise survey from early December 2021. The results were used to inform an acoustic model to establish existing noise levels at surrounding residential properties and to predict likely noise levels, including concurrent use of pitches and taking into account burst noises including shouts, whistles, and hockey balls hitting sticks and backboards.
33. The NIA concludes that the modelled noise levels from bursts of noise would be below typical maximum ambient noise levels and therefore the impact should

be negligible on the nearby sensitive noise receptors, these being neighbouring residential properties. If the AGP was used in isolation, or if multiple pitches were in use during the day, it predicts that the impact would be similarly negligible. However, when the AGP and adjacent turf pitches were in use during the evening, the combined noise levels would result in a moderate impact at most sensitive residential receptors. For comparison, the impact arising from concurrent use of the 2 existing pitches is predicted to be moderate on some sensitive receptors. However, rugby and football are often cancelled due to waterlogging and the proposal would result in an increased intensity and duration of formal, including novel, sports including on traditionally quieter early Sunday evenings and nearly every weekday evening through the year. There would therefore be moderate adverse impacts on a greater number of sensitive residential receptors for much more of the time.

34. The predicted moderate impact falls between the lowest observable adverse effect level and significant observed adverse effect level. According to the Planning Practice Guidance and the Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE), at this level noise begins to cause changes in behaviour and attitude and adverse effects on health and quality of life can be detected. The NPSE advises that quality of life is a subjective measure that refers to people's emotional, social and physical well-being and health refers to physical and mental well-being. However, the NIA does not obviously take into account the effect of the increased frequency and duration of the noise or the subjective response of the neighbouring residents. The guidance is also clear that while noise impacts in this range may be acceptable, consideration still needs to be given to mitigating and minimising the adverse effects, taking account of the economic and social benefits being derived from the activity causing the noise. I will return to this later in my decision.
35. The increase in the number of formal sports participants and spectators would not only result in increased pitch use, but also a generally increased level of activity in the surrounding area. The surfaced access to the AGP would be from the junction of Clarendon Crescent and Dane Road. The concentration of activity in this area would adversely affect the residents around the north west edges of the site, particularly Clarendon Crescent, who would be disturbed by the increased comings and goings. The increased noise and activity would have potential to disturb residents during the day, such as home workers in first floor rooms. However, it would be most disturbing during the evenings which have previously been quieter in part due to the seasonal nature of rugby and football, the restricted floodlighting and often unplayable pitches.

On-street parking

36. By virtue of proximity to bus and Metrolink stops, cycling infrastructure and cycle parking at the Sports Club, the Field is accessible by sustainable transport modes. While Club members would be carrying sports equipment, at least some that live within walking or easy public transport distance would be expected to travel by these modes. Nevertheless, a proportion of Club members would be likely to travel by private vehicle.
37. There is no parking provision at Clarendon Field such that visitors travelling by vehicle would need to park in the surrounding area. Some of the demand would be met by the 52 space car park at Sale Sports Club. However, the appellant acknowledges that there are currently times when existing parking demand

cannot be accommodated at the Club. The evidence from the neighbouring residents is that the existing evening and weekend Club and Clarendon Field activities often results in overspill parking on nearby streets and that indiscriminate and inconsiderate parking causes considerable inconvenience.

38. The Transport Statement suggests that the proposal would not result in increased transport or parking demand, in part because Club hockey players would not need to drive to the Field or to the Club for social activities as they currently do. However, this appears to be somewhat contradicted by the proposed travel plan measures and action plan, which are designed to control the impact of the proposal on the surrounding highways and to minimise offsite parking given the lack of parking provision.
39. Proposed travel plan measures include encouraging Club and community users of the AGP and Field, through travel packs, club website and noticeboards, to use sustainable forms of transport, or to car share, and to use the Club car park and to avoid parking on public roads. There would be liaison with a local taxi firm to secure favourable rates and with local cycle shops to secure discounts. Repeat travel surveys of Club members would be used to inform a review of transport objectives and targets.
40. While these measures would positively influence the behaviour of some Club members, taking into account the current situation and the likely increase in traffic, it seems reasonably likely that there would continue to be times when the demand for parking in association with the proposal and the Club facilities, including club house, would outstrip the supply at the Club car park. Taking into account the evidence in relation to the adverse impact arising from the existing overspill parking, a further increase in traffic and demand for on-street parking, with associated noise and activity, would contribute to cumulative adverse impacts on the nearby residential occupiers.

Overall findings in relation to residential amenity

41. When the floodlighting was not in use, the proposal would not be overbearing and it would not result in a poor outlook from neighbouring residential properties. However, and while the floodlighting would not result in unacceptable light spill or glare to habitable room windows, by virtue of extent, frequency and duration it would be visually intrusive and detrimental to the surrounding residential occupiers. The predicted noise levels from concurrent use of the AGP and natural grass pitches would be similar to the existing worst case scenario, but the neighbouring occupiers would experience the adverse impact, and novel sources of noise, for more of the time including times of the day and week that have been historically undisturbed by formal sport activity. The increased comings and goings to the Field would also result in noise and disturbance to neighbouring residential occupiers. Increased on-street parking pressure would further harm residential amenity.
42. Even if these factors individually would not be significantly detrimental to the nearby residential occupiers, in combination there would be significant cumulative adverse effects on their residential amenity.
43. The Council suggests if the appeal was allowed then the hours of operation of the AGP and the floodlighting should be restricted by planning condition in order to mitigate the adverse effects of lighting, noise and disturbance during the mornings, evenings and weekends. In this regard, it considers that the

hours of use of floodlighting should be restricted to 3 weekday evenings between 1800 and 2100. This would be in line with the existing hours of floodlighting, which have long achieved a compromise between formal sports use and the protection of residential amenity.

44. While the appellant maintains that the hours applied for would result in no harm, he is agreeable to a further restriction although not to the extent the Council proposes. In this regard, he points out that limiting floodlighting to only 3 evenings a week would allow for Club use but, together with the Council's proposed 0930 weekday start and 1200 finish on Sundays, it would be likely to prevent some of the community use agreement (the CUA) activities.
45. At the hearing, the appellant suggested alternative hours of floodlighting and therefore use of 0900-1900 on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays, 0900-2100 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and 0900-1600 on Sundays. The Council acknowledges that these hours would be more acceptable than those applied for but points out that the proposed 1900 finish on 3 days could still result in up to 3-4 hours of floodlighting during winter. On the 3 days of the week that floodlighting is proposed 0900-2100, the lights could similarly be used from sunset or earlier until 2100, resulting in far longer than the current 1800-2100. The appellant's suggested compromise position would therefore still be a significant increase in frequency and duration of lighting and intensification of formal sporting activity, noise and disturbance over the course of the year.
46. Consequently, on the basis that the Council's proposed hours would compromise the operation and the benefits of the proposal, but the appellant's proposed hours would not mitigate the significant adverse effects on neighbouring residents, I am not satisfied that this matter could be adequately addressed by the imposition of either of the parties' suggested planning conditions.
47. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would harm the living conditions and residential amenity of the neighbouring and nearby residential occupiers, with particular regard to visually intrusive light, noise and disturbance. It would conflict with the residential amenity aims of LP policy L7. It would also conflict with the residential amenity and living condition aims of the Framework.

Other Considerations

Flood risk

48. The existing grass pitch playing surface is poor quality, in part because of seasonal waterlogging due to compaction and a perched water table. This would be rectified by a scheme of improved surface water management. The AGP would be formed with a drainage aggregate to provide temporary water storage during extreme events prior to ground infiltration or, if this would not be feasible, discharge to the combined sewer in Dane Road. Shallow swales at the base of the bunds would collect and store slope runoff prior to ground infiltration. The replacement grass pitch would be improved by thatch removal, reduction in soil compaction and an infiltration-based drainage system such as French drains. The landscape planting proposals, including long grass and trees, would contribute to surface water management by intercepting and slowing any overland flow and through transpiration.

49. The Council and its consultees are satisfied that the drainage proposals would not increase the risk of flooding in the surrounding area and the planning application was not refused on grounds relating to flooding. However, local residents and Councillors remain concerned in this regard, including in relation to the effectiveness of infiltration drainage given the perched water table and the potential for water to be displaced from the pitches and to flood the lower lying gardens and homes to the north.
50. The drainage proposals would reduce the surface compaction and thatch that contribute to waterlogging, increase water storage capacity beneath the pitch surfaces, and that water would either infiltrate into the ground, as currently happens, or drain to the combined sewer. In the unlikely event that any surface water did travel north from the grass pitch it would be intercepted by the bund, swales and planting. Irrespective that United Utilities (UU) would not accept surface water to the combined sewer from the wider amenity grassland or the bunds and swales, there is little substantive evidence that the proposal would contribute to the risk of flooding. Both the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and UU are satisfied with the submitted details and consider that a scheme of surface water drainage in accordance with the drainage hierarchy could be secured by planning condition. Having reviewed the evidence, I see no reason to disagree.
51. Third parties have also raised concerns about the processing of the planning application, including that revisions to an original report removed important cautionary text that Members should have been made aware of. The hearing was told that the report in question was revised to correct it as it had misrepresented UU's position. I am also aware that local residents remain unsatisfied with the Council and LLFA's responses to their questions in relation to drainage matters. However, this is not a matter for the appeal and any complaints about the Council should be progressed through its complaints procedures and the Local Government Ombudsman if necessary.

Highway matters

52. The proposal was not refused on grounds relating to highway safety. However, the third parties are concerned that an increase in traffic and on-street parking would be detrimental to the safe operation of the highway. The residents are well placed to observe existing traffic conditions, including inconsiderate parking and obstructions to flow caused by Sale Sports Club traffic. However, while there would be a likely increase in vehicle movements and overspill parking, I am satisfied that the proposal would not contribute to significant cumulative adverse or unacceptable impacts on highway safety or the wider road network.
53. The definitive route of the PRow would not be affected by the proposal, although a temporary diversion would be required during construction and future consideration might be given to a slight diversion to avoid the rugby pitch. On this basis, there would be no harm to the PRow itself.

Fallback

54. I note the suggestion that the fallback position would not be the existing level of formal sports but rather what could be achieved without planning permission. In this regard, the existing grass pitches could be improved by drainage and management to support more regular and intensive use.

However, formal sports would continue to be limited by the restricted hours of flood lighting. The existing pitches could not be used as intensively or for the same amount of time or for the expanded range of sports as the proposal. Irrespective, the appellant confirmed at the hearing that there would be no intention to improve the existing pitches if the appeal should fail. On this basis, the realistic fallback position appears to be the existing situation and level of use and this does not provide a justification for the proposal.

Scheme benefits

55. In the absence of an AGP, Sale Hockey Club (SHC) currently play and train in Manchester. SHC has existed for over 100 years and it has fostered elite athletes in the past. It has a large affiliation of playing members, with several senior teams and an extensive junior section, with junior coaching sessions and school club links. It is the only section of Sales Sports Club unable to play at its home ground and, since hockey is now played exclusively on artificial pitches, the hockey section cannot return to the Club until the under provision of AGP in the area is addressed. The proposal would undoubtedly be a significant benefit to SHC and Sale Sports Club including in terms of cost and travel time, social benefits and the recruitment of players. SHC might also be more competitive if it had access to enhanced training facilities.
56. England Hockey consider that Sale Sports Club is a key site for the development and sustainability of hockey in the Trafford area. Moreover, as clubs are the backbone of sport, new and improved local facilities are essential to deliver strategic national priorities. While there would therefore be national hockey benefits, these would be limited taking into account the small contribution that each of the many local clubs make to the national whole. Moreover, SHC has continued to operate for many years in the absence of its own AGP and there is little substantive evidence that the hockey section would fail, or that if it did talented players would not join other clubs, or that hockey nationally would be significantly disadvantaged in the absence of the proposal.
57. The AGP would be suitable for year round use by a range of sports activities including hockey, tennis, netball and football. This would diversify the sports offer at the site. However, activities such as walking netball, junior hockey and school holiday multi-sports camps already take place at the nearby main Sports Club site, albeit that the AGP might be a more suitable surface. The improved grass pitch would be a benefit to rugby and football, as fewer sessions would be cancelled due to waterlogging. There would be wider public benefits, including health and well-being, social and sports, from increased participation in sports including hockey.
58. Under the proposed CUA, the AGP or a part of it would be available at certain times for use by local charitable, community and school groups and also on a 'pay and play' basis by members of the public. The indicative schedule sets out the times when the AGP would be available for community use, but not the proportion of time it would be available free of charge or on a chargeable basis or the charging schedule. I understand the Sports Club successfully operates a CUA for its club house, but there is little evidence of a significant unmet demand for an all weather pitch for community or school group use or for public pay and play. Therefore, while I accept the CUA would be negotiated in good faith, there is little evidence of significant community or public benefits.

59. Although there is little evidence that waterlogging is a significant constraint to informal recreational use of the Field, the improved surface water drainage could improve parts of it for informal users. The surface improvements to site access points would benefit all users, including disabled persons, at times when the access paths would otherwise be muddy or wet. The proposed seating, picnic area, natural play area and bins would diversify the facilities available but, while they would be used by some informal users, they would not significantly enhance the open space. The appellant suggests the increased floodlighting and more intensive use of the site would result in greater surveillance and thereby reduce the fear of crime. However, the existing uninterrupted expanse of amenity grass already allows for a high degree of surveillance from surrounding properties and from within the Field. These would all be limited benefits.
60. The bunds, swales and planting would increase the diversity of habitats and species. The proposal would provide greater biodiversity benefits than the existing amenity grass, thereby contributing to multifunctional green infrastructure. However, the biodiversity benefits would be offset by the high levels of recreational disturbance by people and dogs, noise and light pollution and there is little evidence the proposal would make any meaningful contribution to climate change mitigation.
61. My attention has been drawn to a planning application (ref 98386/OUT/19) for residential development on Trafford College's Timperley site. The evidence suggests that scheme would deliver new housing on previously developed land, the replacement of a disused sports pitch, and the capital raised would be reinvested in education. The AGP was originally proposed to replace the loss of the disused sports pitch. However, that application was withdrawn following the refusal of the application subject of the appeal. I am aware of the support for the appeal from the Trafford College Group who consider that the AGP would unlock the benefits of that scheme. However, there is little evidence that even if that scheme was resubmitted it would be approved or that there would be no alternative solutions to mitigate the loss of the Timperley sports pitch if the appeal should fail. The withdrawn scheme does not provide a justification for the appeal, which I have considered on its own merits.
62. I have also been made aware of an appeal decision at Wellington School in Timperley (ref APP/Q4245/A/12/2172715) that relates to an artificial pitch with 3m fencing on a school playing field. In allowing the appeal, the Inspector found the effects on the living conditions of nearby residential occupiers, which was the only reason for refusal, would not be so serious as to outweigh the operational benefits of the improved playing field facilities for the school especially taking into account the Secretary of State's policy presumption in favour of school development. However, it did not include floodlighting so its use is limited to daylight hours and it is not directly comparable to the appeal scheme in terms of its design, surroundings or the policy context. The appeal proposal does not benefit from a national policy presumption in favour of the development. That scheme does not provide a justification for the proposal.
63. Understandably, there is a high level of support from members of Sale Sports Club, many of whom would benefit even if they do not live in the immediately surrounding area. There is also support at the strategic level for the provision of a new AGP with improved replacement grass pitch from Sport England and England Hockey. Conversely, there is a high level of objection including from

local Councillors, neighbouring residential occupiers and the local community who currently use the Field informally and who would not benefit from the formal sports provision or CUA.

Planning Balance

64. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the determination of planning applications and appeals must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
65. I have found that elements of the proposal would not be visually appropriate in the context of the existing open space, and that in its entirety the proposal would harm rather than enhance the character and appearance of Clarendon Field. Consequently, there would be conflict with LP Policy L7 and the Sale Strategic Place Objectives SA09 and SA016. The harm in this regard weighs significantly against the scheme.
66. The proposal would result in detrimental impacts on neighbouring residential occupiers. While restrictions on hours of floodlighting, and therefore use, could theoretically mitigate the visual, noise and disturbance impacts on residential amenity, the evidence suggests that a level of use compatible with the residential surroundings would unacceptably compromise the operation and the benefits of the proposal. Consequently, the harm to residential living conditions and amenity and the conflict with LP Policy L7 weigh at least moderately against the scheme.
67. The proposal would contribute to the provision and maintenance of good quality and accessible sport facilities. However, there would be a reduction in the quantity and quality of the protected open space, including in terms of its functionality, accessibility and its value as a visual amenity for informal recreational users and the public. There would be an increased perception and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour for informal users. The harm to the protected open space, and the consequent conflict with LP Policy R5, weighs moderately against the proposal.
68. On the other hand, the proposal would contribute to the supply of AGP in the area and it would provide Sale Hockey Club with home facilities for both training and match play close to the main Sale Sports Club site. This would be a significant benefit to the hockey section. There would be modest benefits for rugby and football at the club level. However, the wider public benefits from increased participation in sports, including through the CUA, would be offset by the disbenefits in terms of health and well-being of informal users. These matters collectively weigh in favour of the proposal to a moderate degree.
69. The absence of harm to protected species, the biodiversity benefits and contribution to the green infrastructure network carry limited weight in favour of the scheme. The improvement to the access points and the benefit to informal users from improved drainage and informal facilities also carry limited positive weight. The short-term economic benefits during construction carry limited weight. The accessibility by sustainable transport modes and the absence of significant harm to the safe operation of the highway, subject to conditions, carry neutral weight.

70. While sports club members might go on to compete at higher levels, the proposal would be sports pitches to meet a local club need. It would not be a national or international sporting venue nor is there substantive evidence that it would contribute significantly to CO2 emissions. The proposed surface water management would not increase the risk of flooding. Compliance with LP Policy L5 in this regard weighs neither for nor against the scheme.
71. Drawing this together, the enhancement of the formal sports provision and playing fields is acceptable in principle. However, while the proposal would result in better formal sports provision, it would harm the character and appearance of the area, the protected open space with particular regard to informal recreational users, and residential amenity. These weigh significantly and moderately against the scheme. Conversely, the benefit to Sale Sports Club, and to hockey more widely, weigh in favour of the proposal to a moderate degree. Other considerations carry limited weight or are neutral. Consequently, in the balance, the benefits are not of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the harms.

Conclusion

72. For the reasons set out above, the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole and there are no material considerations that would outweigh that conflict.
73. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Sarah Manchester

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

For the appellant:

Mr Matthew Whiteley	Sale Sports Club
Mr Mateo Espinosa	Senior Planner, WSP
Mr Doug Hann	Planning Director, WSP
Mr Jason Palmer	Planning Manager, Notts Sport
Mr Dick Longdin	Landscape Director, Randall Thorp
Mr Jan Senior	Key Account Executive and Lighting Specialist, Halliday Lighting
Mr Jake Howarth	Principal Consultant, Hann Tucker Associates

For the Council:

Mr Jeff Davies	Major Planning Projects Officer
Mr David Pearson	Head of Major Planning Projects
Mr Richard Pollitt	Environmental Protection Team Leader
Mrs Rachael Hall	Environmental Health Officer
Mr Geoff Evenson	Principal Engineer, Local Highway Authority
Mr Gareth Owen	Senior Engineer, Lead Local Flood Authority

Interested parties, including:

Mr Jamie Pover	Facilities Relationship Manager, England Hockey
Dr Nicky Martins	Hockey player at Sale Sports Club
Cllr Rob Duncan	representing local residents
Cllr Barry Brotherton	representing local residents
Mr Terence Massey	Local resident
Ms Rachael Lewis	Local resident
Mr Andrew McInity	Local resident
Mr Peter Miners	Local resident
Ms Mary Judge	Local resident