



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 30 July 2025

Site visit made on 30 July 2025

by Ryan Cowley MPlan (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 1st October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F5540/W/25/3365422

Gunnersbury Sports And Social Ground Club, Park Place, Acton, Hounslow, London W3 8JY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Goran Tasic-Komosal, on behalf of Vuk Banqueting Suite Limited, against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hounslow.
 - The application Ref is P/2024/3210.
 - The development proposed is to retain part of the existing surface car park and to vary the layout and extent thereof.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. In the banner heading I have set out a truncated form of the description of development in the application form, omitting that which is unnecessary to accurately describe the scheme.
3. In addition to varying the layout and extent of the existing surface car park, the appeal scheme seeks to regularise the northern car park, which was granted planning permission in 2021¹ but was not lawfully implemented. The appeal is thus considered, in part, retrospectively.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - Whether or not the development provides an appropriate level of car parking, with regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan, and its effect on highway and pedestrian safety;
 - Whether the development results in the unjustified loss of open space, sports and / or recreational land;
 - The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area, including the Gunnersbury Park Conservation Area (CA); and
 - The effect of the development on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties, with particular regard to noise and disturbance.

¹ Council Ref P/2018/1711

Reasons

Car parking and highway and pedestrian safety

5. The appeal site primarily comprises the former London Underground Sports and Social Club, consisting of a clubhouse and sports ground (use class F2). Vehicular access to the site is via Park Place, a short residential street flanked by two short terraces, connecting to the North Circular (A406). Planning permission has also been granted on the wider site for change of use of part of the existing sports club to a day nursery² and change of use of part of the site to a dog exercise area³, though the appellant indicates that these are weekday/term time uses operating outside the peak usage period of the events and sporting uses.
6. The proposal seeks to regularise the existing parking situation, provide an uplift in parking capacity at the site, following work by Transport for London (TfL) which precluded use of part of the northern car park previously approved, and provide better accessibility, with parking closer to the buildings. The development would vary the layout of the existing car park by expanding it down the eastern side of the clubhouse and to the west of the retained football pitches. The appeal is supported by a highways appeal statement⁴ including a car park occupancy report, which seeks to provide technical justification for the proposed level of car parking.
7. Policy T6 of the London Plan March 2021 (the London Plan) states that car parking should be restricted in line with levels of existing and future public transport accessibility and connectivity. It indicates that developments should be designed to provide the minimum necessary parking. Where sites are redeveloped, parking provision should reflect the current approach and not be re-provided at previous levels. There are otherwise no local minimum or maximum parking standards before me for development of this nature. The appropriateness of the car parking provided for this type of development must therefore be assessed on a case-by-case basis, in view of the available evidence.
8. While somewhat conflicting evidence has been presented in respect of the number of car parking spaces at the site, this matter was clarified at the hearing. Though the appellant suggested that 109 cars can already be accommodated in the northern car park, and 131 on the wider site, consent has not been granted for this. While the Council does not dispute the acceptability of the previously approved parking areas, the 2021 permission sought to limit the northern car park to just 90 vehicles. Along with 22 bays in the western car park, which lies within the Sports and Social Club site but outside the boundary of this appeal, the consented scheme would have provided 112 car parking spaces across the wider site. Notably however 12 spaces have since been lost due to the works by TfL.
9. The proposed layout plan in this case depicts 78 marked bays in the northern car park, accounting for the TfL work. The proposal would add a further 21 spaces in the extended grassland area to the south, which together would provide 99 spaces. Additionally, part of the existing western car park would be reconfigured to provide 6 disabled bays, resulting in the loss of 11 regular bays. Within the boundary of the appeal site there would thus be 105 car parking spaces.

² Council Ref P/2004/2545

³ Appeal Ref APP/F5540/A/13/2207803

⁴ Bancroft Consulting, Appeal Statement (Highways) (April 2025), Revision A

10. Combined with the 11 remaining regular spaces in the western car park, this would bring the total number of car parking spaces across the wider site to 116, representing an increase of 4 spaces above the previously approved scheme. Though not significantly greater than the numbers previously approved, the previous permission was not lawfully implemented, an appreciable amount of time has passed since it was granted and the business profile has changed, yet an updated transport assessment and trip generation details have not been provided.
11. The clubhouse premises is licensed for up to 499 people, with the peak demand for the events space typically being in the evenings on weekends. Peak demand for the sports pitches is also typically on weekends but mostly during the day. The appellant indicated at the hearing that the other uses that occur on site simply make use of the parking areas when they are not being used for primary activities.
12. The car park occupancy report shows that, over the course of 9 months, the capacity of the existing car parking was only exceeded on a single occasion, where a peak of 108 vehicles was recorded on-site, associated with an event at the clubhouse and achieved through marshalling and double parking. The second highest peak occupancy level was 96 vehicles. The data however shows a maximum average peak occupancy of just 59 vehicles, which occurred in May 2024, and is appreciably lower than the existing capacity.
13. Moreover, the site has a Public Transport Access Level (PTAL) of 3, indicating moderate public transport accessibility, and I saw on my site visit that it is within a reasonable walking distance from Acton Town and Gunnersbury tube stations. Public transport to the site would thus be a feasible option for many of those using the sports facilities or spectating. Sports teams travelling as a group, whether by private or public transport means, would also limit the number of vehicles accessing the site at one time.
14. I recognise that patrons of some events at the clubhouse, such as parties and weddings, may be more inclined to travel by private car, particularly in bad weather or when wearing formal dress. Nevertheless, guests of such events are equally as likely to share private transport or to use taxi services, thereby limiting parking demand. This would appear to be reflected in the evidence, with only a handful of instances where parking demand approached or exceeded the existing capacity.
15. I am thus satisfied that any excess parking demand, on the few occasions that it does occur, can reasonably be offset by other modes of travel, without undue harm to the surrounding road network. This could be achieved through the adoption of an up-to-date Travel Plan. Based on the evidence, there is therefore no compelling justification for an extension to the existing car parking facilities.
16. Policy T6.5 requires that, for recreational and leisure uses, 6% of designated bays should be provided as disabled persons parking, with a further 4% provided as enlarged bays (capable of becoming disabled persons parking quickly and easily). Based on the evidence, there would appear to be capacity for 5 enlarged bays on site, in accordance with the policy requirements. However, the proposal would provide only 6 formal disabled parking bays, which is less than 6% of the total.
17. While the proposed layout plan does not show a dedicated pedestrian route through the site, the highways appeal statement does include details of a potential pedestrian route between the car park access and the clubhouse. Moreover, vehicles within the site would be travelling at low speeds, and so the risk and

severity of any conflict between users of the site would be limited. The Council acknowledged at the hearing that this matter could likely be resolved through an access strategy, and I am satisfied that this could have been secured by planning condition, as suggested, had the scheme otherwise been acceptable.

18. Concerns have been raised by interested parties with regard to the impact of the development on the local highway network, and highway and pedestrian safety beyond the site. There is however no substantive evidence that the proposed increase in parking capacity would have a severe impact on the road network or unacceptable impacts on highway safety. Notably, this did not explicitly form part of the reason for refusal, nor did TfL raise this matter in their objections.
19. While I have found that the development would not have a harmful effect on highway and pedestrian safety, it would not provide an appropriate level of car parking, with regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan. It would conflict with Policy EC2 of the London Borough of Hounslow Local Plan 2015-2030 (the Local Plan), and Policies T1, T4 and T6 of the London Plan. These policies, among other provisions, seek to secure a more sustainable local travel network, maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and using public transport and promote 'low car' development. They also seek to ensure that developments facilitate the delivery of the Mayor's strategic transport target, reflect and are integrated with current and planned transport access, capacity and connectivity, and restrict car parking in line with levels of public transport accessibility and connectivity.
20. While they are referred to in the Council's reason for refusal pertaining to this issue, I have not identified any direct conflict with Policies CC1 or CC2 of the Local Plan or Policy D6 of the London Plan in this regard. These policies concern context and character, urban design and architecture and housing quality and standards.

Open space, sports and recreational land

21. The appeal site is designated as Local Open Space in the Local Plan. The proposed car park extension would use a proprietary grass reinforcement mesh that would be laid over the existing grass turf that forms part of the playing field. Its purpose would be to support the existing sports and indoor event uses at the site.
22. Policies GB2 and GB9 of the Local Plan seek to protect and improve outdoor sports facilities and Local Open Space. They expect development to be consistent with open space designations and avoid the loss of outdoor sports facilities, including playing fields, except in very special circumstances, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Furthermore, the policies require that sports facilities must retain a sense of openness, and development must avoid the loss of or encroachment upon Local Open Space, or intrusion into an open aspect.
23. Paragraph 104 of the Framework indicates that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless (a) it is surplus to requirements; (b) it would be replaced by equivalent or better provisions; or (c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision and the benefits clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.
24. While it may not physically impact the size and utility of the existing pitches, the car park extension would result in the formal loss of an area of Local Open Space

and erode the playing field. Compelling evidence that this land is surplus to requirements has not been presented. This may affect the ability to reorganise the pitches and prejudice their future use. Moreover, the appeal scheme would not provide alternative or replacement sports and recreational provision, on site or elsewhere. It would result in encroachment upon the Local Open Space, and the proliferation of parked cars here would intrude upon its openness.

25. As set out above, it has not been adequately demonstrated that there is a need for the proposed car park extension. Accordingly, there are no special circumstances that would justify development on the sports and recreational land, and the public benefits of the scheme are insufficient to outweigh the harm to Local Open Space.
26. The development would result in the unjustified loss of open space, sports and / or recreational land. It would conflict with Policies GB2 and GB9 of the Local Plan, and Policy G4 of the London Plan. These policies, among other provisions, seek to protect and enhance open space and the provision of outdoor sports facilities to meet the diverse needs of the borough's population now and in the future.

Character and appearance

27. The site is located towards the eastern edge of the Gunnersbury Park CA, in an extension to the CA boundary introduced in 2018. Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
28. The CA is dominated by Gunnersbury Park in the centre, with the Gunnersbury Park residential estate to the east. This comprises several tree-lined terraced streets and semi-detached houses, formally arranged and punctuated by pockets of open space and recreational land. The Gunnersbury Park Conservation Area Appraisal November 2018 (CA Appraisal) found that the conservation area's special architectural and historic interest lies primarily in the mansion, small mansion, garden buildings, outbuildings and park, which have been highlighted by statutory listing. The Gunnersbury Park residential estate is also considered to be a complete and relatively unspoilt example of a 1920s garden suburb estate.
29. The appeal site is only briefly mentioned in the CA Appraisal, and the evidence indicates that the existing buildings on site are of limited historic and architectural interest. Nevertheless, the sports fields provide a visual and spatial buffer between the somewhat industrial looking TfL depot to the east and the residential areas and park to the west. The site thus contributes to the openness and verdant character of the area and provides a pleasant setting to the traditional garden suburb estate.
30. While part of the field has already been demarcated by temporary plastic barriers and rope, and informally used for parking and vehicular access, the existing treatment of this area is unlikely to encourage permanent parking. I saw on my site visit that it remains predominantly open and free from obstruction.
31. The development would extend the formal parking areas further south and result in the permanent presence of vehicles parked in this area. This would be a significant incursion into the existing field and, particularly at busy times, would erode the openness of the site. While the proposed reinforced ground mesh would allow the grass to be retained across the parking area, the frequent presence of cars would diminish the green nature of the field, and heavy usage may preclude its healthy

growth. The proposed car park extension would thus detract from the existing contribution of the site to the character and appearance of this part of the CA.

32. While I recognise that the site of the car park extension is somewhat screened by the existing mature vegetation along the site boundary, the mesh boundary fencing and gaps in the vegetation still allow partial views, particularly from Park Place. The car park extension would also be visible from some neighbouring properties, and the deciduous landscape screening will be less effective in winter months.
33. The development would thus have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, and fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. It would conflict with Policies CC1, CC2, CC4, GB2 and GB9 of the Local Plan, and Policy D4 of the London Plan. These policies, among other provisions, support high quality urban design, and seek to ensure that development has due regard to the urban context, responds to the history of the area, conserves and enhances features or qualities that contribute to its character, integrates or adds to the natural landscape, conserves or enhances the significance of the borough's designated heritage assets, and preserves the predominantly open character of open spaces and outdoor sports facilities.
34. With respect to paragraph 215 of the Framework, less than substantial harm would be caused to the significance of the CA, which is a designated heritage asset. Paragraph 212 of the Framework is clear that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The development would provide additional car parking to support the existing business and sports facilities and improve access to the buildings on site from the parking areas. However, these public benefits would be insufficient to outweigh the identified harm.

Living conditions

35. The existing car parking facilities at the site are predominantly contained to the north. The proposal would increase the use of the central part of the site by motor vehicles and extend the car parking across a wider area. A noise assessment has not been submitted. Accordingly, I must assess the relevant matters on the merits of the case as I see them.
36. An updated Car Park Management Plan (CPMP) dated April 2025⁵ has been provided. This sets out various measures to control use of the parking areas, including pre-registration of approved vehicles via an online booking system, CCTV monitoring, advice on public transport, taxis and coaches, trained staff supervision for events, and appropriate signage to direct users of the site and encourage considerate behaviour.
37. Nevertheless, a significant number of objections to the application were received from the occupiers of neighbouring properties. A local ward Councillor and other interested parties also participated in the hearing. Several of these representations have raised concerns regarding noise and disturbance emanating from the appeal site and existing car park, suggesting the previous CPMP has not been successful.
38. The development would extend the area from which noise and disturbance associated with the operation of a car park can be heard, including engine noises, vehicle alarms and reversing warnings, in-car audio, horns and the sound of doors

⁵ Aspbury Planning Limited, (Draft) Car Park Management Plan, (April 2025), Version: Final (V5)

opening and closing. The site at times operates late into the evening and early morning. It is thus likely to increase the level of noise and disturbance experienced by the occupiers of neighbouring properties, particularly those closest to the proposed car park extension. I am not persuaded based on the evidence before me that the submitted draft CPMP would be sufficient to adequately mitigate this.

39. The development would thus have a harmful effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties, with particular regard to noise and disturbance. It would conflict with Policy CC2 of the Local Plan, and Policies D4 and D14 of the London Plan. These policies, among other provisions, seek to ensure that developments function well in themselves and in their effect on surrounding areas, have a positive impact on the amenity of current and future residents, and manage noise by avoiding significant adverse noise impacts on health and quality of life, mitigating and minimising existing and potential adverse impacts of noise from new development and improving the acoustic environment.
40. While they are referred to in the Council's reason for refusal pertaining to this issue, I have not identified any direct conflict with Policies CC1 and CC4 of the Local Plan in this regard. These policies primarily concern the context and character of the area, and the protection of heritage assets.

Other Matters

41. I acknowledge that the appeal scheme would support the existing sports and indoor events facility by providing an increase in parking capacity and improved access to the existing buildings. Given the accessibility of the site by other modes of transport this would however be a relatively modest benefit, for which there is limited justification.
42. The Planning Practice Guidance and the Framework encourage local planning authorities to take a positive approach and work proactively with applicants. While the appellant's frustrations with the level of engagement offered by the Council during the application process is noted, this does not lead me to a different conclusion on the main issues.

Conclusion

43. I have found that the development would not have a harmful effect on highway and pedestrian safety. However, this does not overcome the harm and development plan conflict arising from the provision of an inappropriate level of car parking, the unjustified loss of open space, sports and / or recreational land, and the effect on the character and appearance of the area and the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring properties.
44. The proposal would thus conflict with the development plan, taken as a whole. I have found no material considerations that indicate the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan. Consequently, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

Ryan Cowley

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Antony Aspbury	Agent, Aspbury Planning (Director)
Christopher Bancroft	Transport Consultant, Bancroft Consulting
Goran Tasic-Komosal	Appellant

FOR THE COUNCIL:

Jacky Leung	Senior Planning Officer
Joanna We	Senior Transport Officer

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Joanna Biddolph	Chiswick Gunnersbury Ward Councillor
Deborah Gatty	Gunnersbury Park Garden Estate Residents' Association
Stephen Peiris	Chair, Gunnersbury Park Garden Estate Centenary Society
	Chair, Local Ward Policing Panel