
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 November 2025

by **D M Young JP BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI MIHE**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/25/3359693

Ditchling Rugby Football Club, Land at Keymer Road, Ditchling, East Sussex, BN6 8TR

- 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 Malcom Pedder on behalf of Ditchling Rugby Football Club against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref is SDNP/23/05134/FUL.
 - The development proposed is engineering works, consisting of re-profiling of site and realignment of pitch, new drainage system, creation of new access from Clayton Road leading to new parking area, erection of groundsman's store/facilities, associated landscaping, and extension to the existing allowed playing season.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is allowed, and planning permission is granted for engineering works, to consist of re-profiling of site and realignment of pitch, new drainage system, creation of new access from Clayton Road leading to new parking area, erection of groundsman's store/facilities, associated landscaping, and extension to the existing allowed playing season at Ditchling Rugby Club, Ditchling, BN6 8TR in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref SDNP/23/05134/FUL, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the development on, firstly, the landscape character of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and, secondly, highway safety.

Reasons

Relevant history and planning policy

3. Planning permission was granted in 2020 for the permanent use of the land for one rugby pitch with associated use of the adjacent cricket club car park and clubhouse¹. No new buildings or access roads were proposed as part of the 2020 permission. However, according to the Committee Report, the Authority accepted there would be some visual impacts as a result of the permanent use of the site as a rugby club. Nonetheless, it was considered that the proposal would conserve the open landscape character of the Strategic Gap between Ditchling and Keymer.

¹ LPA Ref: SDNP/20/01676/FUL.

4. The appeal site lies within the SDNP where there is now a legal duty on decision-makers under section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023², “to seek to further” the statutory purposes of the National Park³. Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that “*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks*”. Policy CONS 6 of the Ditchling Westmeston and Streat Neighbourhood Development Plan (the NP) and Policy SD4 of the 2019 South Downs Local Plan (SDLP) state that the distinctive landscape, views and scenic beauty of the national park should be conserved and enhanced.
5. The appeal site is located outside of the Ditchling settlement boundary where SDLP Policy SD25 exceptionally supports development provided there is an essential need for a countryside location, and it responds to the context of the relevant broad area. The appeal site also lies in the Strategic Gap between Ditchling and Kermer. NP Policy CONS 7 states that proposals for new development in the gap should conserve and where possible enhance the open landscape character.
6. One of the eight objectives of the SDLP is to protect and provide for the social and economic wellbeing of national park communities supporting local jobs, affordable homes and local facilities. SDLP Policies SD43 and SD46 support the provision of community facilities such as sport pitches where it can be demonstrated that there is a local need; that the scale of the proposal is proportionate to the local area and would not result in the loss of open space. New or improved playing surfaces should be located within or close to settlements.
7. NP Policy CONS 11 states that proposals will be expected to ‘*enhance the existing use and community value of [the site], while safeguarding and where possible enhancing their landscape and biodiversity value.*’ The rugby pitch is also in an area identified under Policy CONS 12 as ‘natural/semi-natural accessible space,’ and part of the green infrastructure network which should be safeguarded from adverse effects of new development.
8. Among other things, NPPF paragraph 88 states that planning decisions should enable the development community facilities and sports venues. In a similar vein paragraph 96 states that decisions should enable and support healthy lives through the provision of safe and accessible sports facilities.

Character and appearance

9. The proposed development involves the erection of a small utility building in the north-west corner of the site. This would contain a groundkeeper’s store, toilets, showers, a first-aid room and kitchen. There would be some landform regrading to facilitate the construction of a 3450m² gravel car park, internal access track and new training area. New 5m wide access from Clayton Road would serve the site through a new formal entrance formed from a pair of stone pillars and iron gates. The development also includes the provision of a wildflower meadow, native tree and hedge planting and new pond created in the southeast corner of the site. The existing pitch would be re-graded with sub-surface drainage installed.
10. The Authority argues that the introduction of these elements would alter the appeal site’s character fundamentally changing its function. While I do not seek to resile

² This updates Section 11A (2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

³ These are: 1) To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas; 2) To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of their areas.

from the agreed position that there would be landscape and visual change to this highly sensitive site, I do not subscribe to the view that there would be a 'fundamental' change to its function. It is, and would remain a rugby club, albeit the use would subsist over a greater area than at present.

11. The appeal site is identified in the 2020 South Downs Landscape Character Assessment as being within the 'scarp footslopes' landscape character type. The application was accompanied by a detailed Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) which assessed the likely landscape and visual effects of the development. Whilst I have had regard to this document and the Authority's response to it my assessment is ultimately informed by my observations on my site visit.
12. Like a great many rugby/football/cricket clubs up and down the country, the appeal site is located on the edge of a settlement, in this case Ditchling. The site currently comprises two distinct parts; the rugby pitch to the north and the agricultural pasture to the south. To the west of the site and further into the Strategic Gap, lies St. James's Montefiore Cricket Club which contains a pavilion, car park, playing pitches and associated infrastructure. To the north of the rugby club and also within the Strategic Gap is a new car park served from Keymer Road. There is a public footpath (FP49) which runs along the eastern boundary of the site and The Drove.
13. Beyond a line of mature oak trees marking the historic field boundary in the centre of the site, the land does not contain any notable landscape features but undoubtedly contributes to the open and bucolic setting to the west of Ditchling. The site slopes gently from south to north and is visually contained from Clayton and Keymer Roads behind established roadside hedges and other landscaping which would be strengthened as part of the scheme.
14. The groundkeeper's store would be a relatively simple single-storey structure with flint walls and a green roof. The Authority raises no issue with its design, nor has it suggested the building would be better sited elsewhere within the appeal site. It would be located discreetly in the north-west corner of the site tightly bounded by mature landscaping on two sides. There is already above ground development in the form of cricket nets in this area. As I saw on my site visit, save for views from FP49, there are very few public locations from where the groundkeeper's store would be visible.
15. The most significant visual effects of the scheme would be experienced from the southern section FP49. From here the current view across agricultural land would be replaced by a view of the training area and car park beyond. Although the proposed wildlife pond and structural landscaping along the footpath and flanking the car park would help to mitigate the impact, particularly in the long-term, there would still be harm. This would be elevated at those times when the car park is in use.
16. While the appeal site maybe visible from the South Downs Way, as Appendix 4 to the Authority's Appeal Statement demonstrates, it would be some distance away. Without the aid of binoculars, I am not persuaded the small amount of above-ground development would be readily apparent, particularly bearing in mind the physical characteristics of the groundkeeper's store set out above. The car park and access may be visible in the short-term, particularly when in use, but would blend into the landscape as the planting matures. The foregoing is supported by the fact that the larger cricket pavilion, associated car park as well as the parish

council's car park are not readily apparent in the Authority's photograph. I am not persuaded that other elements of the scheme such as the training area, internal access track or re-grading of the existing pitch would be perceptible from the South Downs Way.

17. There would of course be views of the access, driveway and car park from Clayton Road. However, these would only be briefly visible in transitory views once the new hedging along the southern site boundary becomes established. The reprofiling of the existing pitch and training area would likely blend into the landscape in a relatively short period of time and would not in my view cause significant harm to the landscape of the SDNP nor erode the essential qualities of the Strategic Gap.
18. Taking all of the above into account, I concur with the LVA that the totality of the proposed development would harm the landscape character of the area. However, taking account of the site's high degree of visual containment, the fact that the majority of the land would remain green and open and the proposed structural landscaping, I judge the medium to long-term visual and landscape effects to be limited rather than significant. As a further matter of judgement, I consider that as far as is reasonably practical, the development has sought to avoid landscape harm.
19. Nonetheless, taking account of the importance attached to the conservation of National Parks in the NPPF, the legal duty under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the conflict, albeit limited, with Policies CONS 6, CONS 7, SD4 and SD25, I attribute significant weight to the identified landscape harm.

Highway safety

20. The NPPF requires development to provide safe and suitable access to the site for all users. At paragraph 111 it states that if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, development should be refused. Whether or not a proposal will be inherently unsafe is a matter of judgement for the decision maker taking account of the evidence.
21. The Local Highway Authority's Appeal Statement raises three principal concerns. First, whether visibility from the site access would be acceptable, second, whether turning manoeuvres to/from the new access onto the B12112 Clayton Road would create an unacceptable highway safety risk and, third, whether there would be an adequate level of on-site parking and manoeuvring. There is evidently a degree of overlap between these issues.
22. The appeal site is currently accessed from the B2166 Keymer Road via The Drove, a narrow, unmade track serving a small number of residential properties and a gated access to the rugby club. Given these limitations it is inherently unsuited to any intensification. As I understand it, the club has had a long-standing arrangement to share facilities with the cricket club, the main access to which is approximately 0.5km to the west and actually nearer to Keymer than Ditchling. As I saw on my site visit, the cricket club access is less than ideal in highway safety terms being located on a de-restricted and unlit section of a B-class road. It is also some distance away from the rugby club and requires users to walk along a narrow footway back towards Ditchling. The third access is a seldom used field access from the B2112 Clayton Road located a short distance to the west of Ditching just outside the existing 30mph zone.

23. The appeal scheme proposes to upgrade and relocate the southern access approximately 160m west of its current position. Pedestrian access to the club would remain as existing using the footpath link from Keymer Road. The new access would comprise a 6m wide bellmouth with 15 metre junction radii together with additional tapers/diverging lanes of 25m on either side to assist with coach turning. The gate would be set-back by 17m from the back of the carriageway. Once upgraded, it would serve as the main access to the rugby club including the proposed 80-space car park. As there would be a significant intensification of use of the relocated southern access it is right that careful attention be paid to whether it would be safe for all road users.

Visibility

24. The plan submitted with the application⁴ details visibility splays of 2.4m x 130m which could be achieved by trimming back the roadside hedges along Clayton Road. According to the Appellant's Highway Report, the splays would fall between the 'absolute' and 'desirable' minimum standards set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB)⁵. While the LHA takes no issue with a 2.4m set-back, it argues that splays of 170m to the west and 159m to the east are necessary to meet the 'desirable' Stopping Sight Distances (SSDs) in DMRB⁶. The LHA go on to argue that only 100m can be achieved to the west due to the vertical and horizontal alignment of Clayton Road and 200m to the east.
25. SSDs are calculated from the reaction and deceleration time of a type of vehicle and the difference between the 'absolute' and 'desirable' standard are a result of different deceleration rates. Manual for Streets (MfS) 2 explains that the LHA's preferred 'desirable' standard is based on a driver-perception reaction time of 2 seconds and a deceleration rate of 2.45m (0.25g). The 'absolute' standard preferred by the Appellant relies on the same reaction time but a deceleration rate of 3.68m/s (0.375g). MfS2 goes on to say that the SSDs in MfS1 were based on as reaction time of 1.5 seconds and a deceleration rate of 0.45g, values which are appropriate for cars but not heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and buses.
26. Based on my own observations and all the highway data before me, I consider Clayton Road to be a medium-trafficked rural road. Despite some variation in the vertical alignment of the road, it is relatively straight and benefits from good forward visibility on the approaches to the proposed new access. As I saw when I carried out my site visit, the road is lightly trafficked outside of peak hours. Moreover, there is a notable absence of larger commercial vehicles due in part to a 7.5t weight restriction.
27. These observations are borne out in the 2018 speed survey data which showed that HGVs and buses accounted for just 0.39% and 0.92% of all west and eastbound traffic - well below the 5% referenced in MfS2. I am therefore satisfied that this is a road where the SSDs should be based on a deceleration rate of 0.375g. Based on the 2024 speed survey, this results in SSDs of 127m to the west and 120m to the east. As the original access plan shows splays of 2.4m x 130m in both directions, I am satisfied that drivers egressing the site would have sufficient visibility in both directions to safely see oncoming traffic.

⁴ Dwg Ref: 1816-003A

⁵ See CD123 Based on a 2-second reaction time and a braking force of 0.375g

⁶ It is argued that 170m is necessary due to the 2% downhill gradient that runs west to east past the site frontage.

28. Adding credence to the above, is the independent Stage 1 Road Safety Audit (RSA) which concluded that the risk of collisions could be satisfactorily mitigated by additional signage. The LHA argues the RSA is invalid because it assessed a “*slightly different access arrangement*”. Having requested the original drawings and compared them to those submitted with the appeal, I find the LHA’s stance in relation to the RSA to be patently unreasonable. In my view the junction design before me is essentially the same as that considered by the safety auditors.
29. I have noted comments from the LHA regarding the vertical alignment of Clayton Road to the west of the proposed access. From my observations, visibility to the west is unrestricted until the brow of the hill (denoted on the ground by two solid white lines in the centre of the carriageway) which is over 200m away from the proposed access point. I am thus satisfied that the vertical alignment of Clayton Road does not prevent the provision of the proposed visibility splays.
30. I have noted the LHA’s criticisms of the 2024 speed survey. Those criticisms need to be viewed in the context that it was the LHA not the Appellant who requested a second survey on the basis that the Covid pandemic could have altered the speed and volume of traffic since 2018. Notwithstanding that I find those reasons to be completely without merit, the Appellant has now submitted two speed surveys. The 2018 survey recorded 85th percentile speeds of 55/56mph whereas the 2024 survey found that speeds had decreased slightly to 52/54mph. This is not therefore a case where an Appellant, seeking to justify a substandard access, has produced an unsolicited speed survey with results that were wildly different to the first.
31. I am satisfied that the location of the 2024 survey (a short distance to the east) is in the same approximate location of the proposed access. In terms of timing, the survey was conducted during the inter-peak and therefore more likely to capture free flowing conditions than a peak-hour survey. I consider 200 vehicles in each direction is a proportionate sample and concerns about the personnel who conducted the survey are unsubstantiated. None of the LHA’s criticisms make any real difference to my decision since the shortfall in the SSDs based on the 2018 survey would have been just 4/8m west/eastbound respectively. In my judgement, this would not be sufficient to justify dismissal of the appeal on highway safety grounds.
32. Notwithstanding the above, the Appellant submitted a revised plan⁷ during the application stage demonstrating how splays of 167m to the east and 156m to the west could be achieved by removing the current hedge, replacing it with a 1.2m high estate fencing and planting a new hedge behind. Given the visual impact of these works and the fact that I have found the ‘absolute’ minimum splays would be acceptable, I do not consider it necessary to make the development conditional upon this plan.

Parking & turning

33. The rugby club currently has no formal on-site parking. Instead, parking is provided at the adjacent cricket club and sometimes at the parish council’s car park on Keymer Road. According to the Appellant, the former is not ideal as the ground is often waterlogged during the winter, the area is also unavailable during the cricket season which overlaps with the rugby season. As previously mentioned, it is also some way from the rugby club. It is said that the parish council car park lacks

⁷ Dwg Ref: PTC/DIC/45405/03

sufficient capacity to meet the demands of bigger events. Based on the foregoing, the Appellant argues that parking can and does take place along Keymer Road. None of the above arguments have been disputed by the LHA.

34. While I have noted those objections which point out that the parking at the cricket club remains available to the rugby club, it is not an unreasonable expectation for a sports club to want to have control over its own parking and for this to be provided on site. Irrespective of whether permission exists to use the cricket car park, it has not been demonstrated that the access from Keymer Road is materially better than the new access from Clayton Road.
35. The proposed car park would be able to accommodate 80 cars and two coaches. This is the level of car parking deemed to be necessary by the rugby club, who in my opinion, are best placed to know what its requirements are. Junior/mini rugby is played on a Sunday morning and senior rugby on a Saturday afternoon with senior training on weekday evenings. Therefore, the likelihood of adult and junior rugby being played at the same time is remote. I do not consider overlapping senior games to be a realistic prospect.
36. While I cannot discount the possibility of the occasional festival or tournament putting pressure on the proposed car park, such events, even if they did take place, are likely to be very infrequent and could be managed through a combination of on-site and off-site parking options. Accordingly, I can see little evidence to support the LHA's contention that there would be insufficient car parking provision and an increase in on-street parking in the area. On the contrary, the provision of an 80-space car park would logically lead to a reduction in the on-street parking that currently takes place which must be seen as a highway benefit.
37. In common with many local sports clubs, it is not intended to formally mark the car park out. I simply cannot accept the LHA's assertion that this would lead to 'haphazard' parking. Such comments are completely unsupported by objective evidence and are inconsistent with my own experience that community sport clubs frequently use volunteers and/or signage to marshal their car parks at busy times. I have no reason to think that this rugby club, with its strong community credentials, would not employ a similar approach.
38. Swept paths provided by the Appellant demonstrate that the geometry of the access road would enable all vehicles including a 15m coach to enter and exit the appeal site conveniently and in a forward gear. The LHA has not produced any supporting evidence to support its concerns that vehicles would need to wait on Clayton Road. This was not identified as an issue in the RSA. In the unlikely event this were to occur, any waiting on Clayton Road would be ephemeral and unlikely to cause a highway safety risk given the ample forward visibility along Clayton Road.
39. I have noted comments from the LHA regarding the tapers. While these might not be promoted, in this case they would clearly facilitate ingress and egress to the site by larger vehicles. Given the speed of traffic along Clayton Road and the occasional use of the access by coaches, I am satisfied they are necessary in this instance.
40. The Appellant has confirmed that there would be no change to the existing pedestrian access. That being the case and given pedestrians are unlikely to access the site from Clayton Road, the diversion of the public footpath is not

something that is required to make the development acceptable. Reference is made to electric vehicle charging points. However, I have not made aware of any Development Plan requirements in this regard and as a result this is not a matter that weighs against the appeal scheme.

41. Reasons for Refusal (RfR) 2 refers to surface water drainage. However, this matter has not been pursued in the LHA's Appeal Statement and is something that can be dealt with by condition.
42. Taking into account all of the above, I am satisfied that the proposed development would not pose an unacceptable highway safety risk. Accordingly, there would be no conflict with NPPF paragraph 115 or Policies SD19 and SD22 of the SDNP.

Other Matters

43. The Authority's fourth RfR concerns the failure to provide sufficient information in relation to biodiversity. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal containing a number of enhancement recommendations was however submitted with the application. I have noted the comments made by the County Council's Ecologist, amongst other things this states that insufficient information has been provided in relation to bat roosts, otters, water voles and Great Crested Newts. However, with the exception of water voles the PEA expressly covers all of these matters.
44. There is no suggestion from the Ecologist that the development would harm protected species or habitats, nor has any positive evidence been adduced to demonstrate the mandatory 10% biodiversity net-gain could not be achieved. In my view, the level of ecological information provided with the application is proportionate to the proposed development and the necessary ecological enhancements including a 10% biodiversity net-gain could be secured through a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (see condition 15).
45. The Authority's fifth RfR concerns the removal of Oak tree 'T3' which took place following a recommendation in the Arboricultural Appraisal Report following the identification of several defects including two significant cavities. The internal access track would have passed through or close to T3's root protection area and therefore it seems likely the tree was removed on safety grounds. The Appellant highlights the Authority's own advice that *"Any protected tree that is dead or dangerous is exempt from the TPO and can be removed without the need to submit an application"*.
46. Several of the objectors have raised what they see as the unauthorised felling of T3 in their written correspondence. The Authority investigated the matter and commenced legal proceedings which I understand were later withdrawn. That being the case and given the T3 was identified as being dangerous before removal, this is not a matter that weighs against the appeal scheme in the planning balance. Suitable replacement planting for T3 can be secured through a landscaping scheme for the site.
47. The Appellant has submitted a plan which indicates the appeal site lies outside the Archaeological Notification Area. While I note the discovery of archaeological material nearby, there is no specific evidence before me to demonstrate that the appeal site *'includes, or has the potential to include, underground heritage assets'*. I am therefore satisfied that matters pertaining to archaeology can be adequately

addressed in the established way through a suitably worded planning condition which would protect any assets should they be found to be present.

48. The Authority consider that there is a potential increase in runoff from the roof of the groundsman store, car park, access road and rugby pitch drainage. It is further stated that no information has been submitted regarding the drainage strategy or flood risk. However, a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) was submitted with the application. This contains all the information one would normally expect in an FRA such as an assessment of flood risk from various sources including surface water, a summary of the ground survey data and a list of mitigation measures.
49. The FRA concluded there would be minimal risk of surface water flooding due to use of a permeable gravel surface to the access road and car park. Moreover, it was found that the risk of surface water flooding on the northern part of the site⁸ could be satisfactorily mitigated by the recommended measures. I have carefully considered the concerns raised by the Local Lead Flood Authority (LLFA). A number of those concerns are addressed in the Appellant's Final Comments which confirm that no mechanical pumping would be required, and the drainage works would reduce the risk of surface water flooding rather than increase it.
50. Given the nature of the proposed development, I do not consider it would be proportionate or reasonable for a detailed drainage strategy including calculations to be provided at this stage. In my view, the FRA adequately demonstrates that a suitable strategy can be provided pursuant to planning conditions. If the LLFA felt otherwise, it was open to them to adduce their own technical evidence to demonstrate 1) how the development would increase flood risk and 2) why that risk could not be mitigated by a drainage strategy. It should be remembered that within the overall legal framework of section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, it is as much for the Authority, and by extension its Statutory Consultees, to make out its case as to why planning permission should be refused as for the Appellant to make out a case that it should be granted. Based on the foregoing, I am satisfied there would be no conflict with SDLP Policy SD49 or NPPF paragraph 181 subject to the imposition of conditions suggested by the Authority.

Conditions

51. The Authority has suggested a number of planning conditions which I have considered the conditions against the advice in the PPG. In some instances, I have amended or amalgamated the conditions in the interests of brevity, to avoid repetition or to ensure compliance with the PPG.
52. I have imposed a time limit and plans conditions to provide certainty. Materials and landscaping conditions are necessary to ensure the satisfactory appearance of the development and to ensure a satisfactory replacement for T3. Highway conditions are necessary in the interests of highway safety. Cycle parking is necessary to encourage sustainable travel modes. A Construction Management Plan is necessary to ensure all aspects of the construction adhere to best practice and do not adversely affect the amenity of local residents.
53. To protect the living conditions of local residents, I have imposed conditions restricting the use of the development and external lighting. However, as set out in

⁸ Identified as being at risk of surface water flooding in the latest NaFRA2 National flood risk modelling.

the Chairman's statement, the club allows the local cubs, scouts, brownies and Guide groups to hold their annual Firework display on the site. I am concerned that the wording proposed by the Authority would prohibit such events. I have therefore amended the suggested condition to ensure the proposed development does not result in a dilution of these community benefits. In so doing, I am satisfied that a small number of community events would not result in unacceptable living conditions for local residents.

54. I have amended the dates in condition 12 so that they reflect the rugby season stipulated by the sport's governing body. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan is necessary to ensure the development delivers a net-gain for biodiversity. An Archaeology condition is necessary to protect any archaeological assets that may be present. I have however imposed a different condition to that suggested by the Authority which I considered disproportionate given my earlier findings. A drainage condition is necessary to ensure the development does not lead to surface water flooding issues in the area. I have incorporated some of the requirements suggested by the LLFA into the condition suggested by the Authority. As the drainage system can be inspected by the LLFA, I am not persuaded that a verification condition is necessary.
55. I am not persuaded a levels condition is necessary since the levels and extent of cut/fill are clearly shown on plan no. DIT5D22. Given that details of tree retention and protection can be secured through the landscaping condition, I consider the suggested condition requiring the submission of a full tree survey, arboricultural method statement and Tree Protection Plan to be excessive. I have omitted the condition accordingly.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

56. The Appellant's Planning and Appeal Statements set out in some detail the justification for the appeal scheme. In short, the club has been based in the village of Ditchling since 1963 and has experienced significant growth and success in recent years. It is now established as one of the top teams in Sussex. There is also a thriving junior/minis section. With that success comes the requirement to improve the pitch and provide basic facilities for players and visitors many of whom are drawn from the local community. I have no reason to doubt that the facilities proposed as part of the current proposal are offered by other clubs in the area. As evidenced from the representations made at the application stage, the proposed development has significant support locally.
57. The Authority disputes the need case put forward by the Appellant arguing the proposed go beyond what can be considered 'basic'. I strongly disagree. There will be very few rugby clubs that do not have on-site parking, a secure space to store groundskeeping equipment, a kitchen, toilets, first-aid room or for that matter changing rooms, which are not applied for here. Accordingly, I consider the facilities proposed as part of this scheme to be necessary for the proper and safe functioning of a rugby club. Irrespective of whether there is agreement or not, the sharing of parking and other facilities with the adjacent cricket club, is not a viable long-term solution for the reasons given by the Appellant.
58. I am therefore satisfied that there is a genuine need for the development which would be proportionate to the local area and would not result in any meaningful loss of open space. The new training area and re-graded pitch would be located

within or close to settlements. The landscape impact of the development has been carefully considered and mitigated as far as possible. Accordingly, the appeal scheme is in broad accordance with SDLP Policies SD43 and SD46. It also garners support from NPPF paragraphs 88 and 96 which promote healthy and safe communities through inclusive and accessible sport and recreation facilities. I attach very significant weight to the above benefits.

59. Weighing against the appeal scheme is the landscape harm identified under the first main issue. Although the harm would be limited in the medium to long-term due to the proposed landscape mitigation, it nonetheless commands significant weight in the planning balance given the site's inherent sensitivity and the strengthened duty relating to protected landscapes. Highway safety, ecology, the loss of T3, archaeology and flood risk are all matters that can be satisfactorily addressed by planning conditions set out in the schedule below. These matters are thus neutral in the planning balance.
60. It is not uncommon for planning policies and considerations to pull in different directions. This case is one such example where the acknowledged community, social and health benefits of the scheme have to be weighed against the environmental harm. The matters for and against the scheme are finely balanced but, in my judgment, the considerable social and community benefits of the proposed development outweigh the identified landscape harm.
61. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed.

D M Young

INSPECTOR

SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following plans: 1816-001, BAC-DIT-LV-009 Rev A, 1816-003A, 1816-004A, DIT15D22, 1816-021, 1816-020, 1816-005 and BAC-DIT-LV-010 Rev B.
- 3) No development shall be carried out above ground floor slab level until details of the materials to be used on the development hereby approved have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in full accordance with the approved schedule and samples.
- 4) No development shall commence until a scheme of landscaping, in general accordance with plan ref: BAC-DIT-LV-010 Rev B, including details of a replacement for T3, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land, identify those to be retained and set out measures for their protection throughout the course of development.
- 5) All planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species.
- 6) No part of the development shall be brought into use until such time as the vehicular access has been constructed in accordance with the approved plans.
- 7) No part of the development shall be brought into use until provision has been made within the site in accordance with plans and details to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, to prevent surface water draining onto the public highway.
- 8) No part of the development shall be brought into use until visibility splays of 2.4 metres by 130 metres have been provided at the proposed site vehicular access onto Clayton Road (B2112). Once provided the splays shall thereafter be maintained and kept free of all obstructions between heights of 800mm and 2.1 metres above the access/highway level.
- 9) No part of the development shall be brought into use until the car park and turning area have been constructed in accordance with plans and details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The area shall thereafter be retained for that use and shall not be used other than for the parking and turning of motor vehicles.
- 10) No part of the development shall be brought into use until covered and secure cycle parking spaces have been provided in accordance with plans and details submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The cycle parking shall thereafter be retained.

- 11) No development shall take place, including any ground works or works of demolition, until a Construction Management Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the approved Plan shall be implemented and adhered to in full throughout the entire construction period. The Plan shall provide details as appropriate but not be restricted to the following matters:
 - the anticipated number, frequency and types of vehicles used during construction,
 - the method of access and egress and routeing of vehicles used during construction,
 - the parking of vehicles by site operatives and visitors,
 - the storage of plant and materials used in construction of the development,
 - the provision and utilisation of wheel washing facilities and other works required to mitigate the impact of construction upon the public highway (including the provision of temporary Traffic Regulation Orders),
 - protection of public rights of way
- 12) No external lighting shall be installed to the building or anywhere within the site. This exclusion shall not prohibit the installation of internal lighting or of sensor-controlled security lighting of 1,000 lumens or less, which shall be designed and shielded to minimise light spillage.
- 13) The facilities hereby approved shall only be used in connection with the operation of the applicant or other local community groups with the express consent of Ditchling Rugby Club subject to a maximum of five events a year.
- 14) The pitch shall only be used during the season between 1 September and 20 May and at no other time. The training area can be used outside of these times.
- 15) Prior to the commencement of development, a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEMP shall incorporate the measures detailed within the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Omega Ecology, June 2023) and include:
 - a) A description, plan and evaluation of landscape and ecological features to be managed;
 - b) Ecological trends and constraints on site that might influence management;
 - c) Long-term aims and objectives of management; to include but not be limited to:
 - Habitat management (including the car park area) and grazing regime;
 - Gapping up of one of the gateways onto B2112 (if both are not needed);
 - Sustainable drainage solutions; for example, wetland habitat creation;

- Sensitive removal of Himalayan balsam (avoiding chemicals close to ditches).
- d) Appropriate management options for achieving aims and objectives;
- e) Prescriptions for management actions, together with a plan of management compartments;
- f) Preparation of a work schedule (including an annual work plan capable of being rolled forward over a five-year period);
- g) Details of the persons, body or organisation responsible for implementation of the plan;
- h) A scheme of ongoing monitoring over a five-year period, to ensure management is generating the desired outcomes and remedial measures (within the five year monitoring period) incorporated where appropriate, including a mechanism to discharge the monitoring by the Local Planning Authority;
- i) Details of any legal and funding mechanism(s) by which the long-term implementation of the plan will be secured by the developer in partnership with any management body responsible for its delivery.

The approved LEMP shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and where deemed necessary by the Local Planning Authority shall include contingencies and/or remedial action to be further agreed and implemented where the results from monitoring show that conservation aims and objectives of the LEMP are not being met.

- 16) No development shall take place until:
- (i) An archaeological field evaluation has been carried out in accordance with a specification and timetable that shall first have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; and
 - (ii) Safeguarding measures to ensure the preservation in situ of important archaeological remains and/or further archaeological investigation and recording identified in the archaeological field evaluation have been undertaken in accordance with a specification and timetable that shall first have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority
- 17) No development shall take place other than in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation approved under condition 15.
- No development shall commence until details of a scheme for surface water drainage (including a full drainage layout together with soakage testing, construction details, supporting run-off calculations and details of future management and maintenance) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. Such details should include provision for all surface water drainage from parking areas and areas of hardstanding to prevent surface water from discharging onto the highway and should be based on site investigation and percolation tests to determine infiltration rates. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details before any part of the development is first occupied and shall be retained thereafter.