



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 November 2025

by Stewart Glassar BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 December 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/T2215/W/25/3369733

Fleetdown United Football Club, Heath Lane, Dartford DA1 2QH

- 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 Kevin Webb against the decision of Dartford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is DA/24/01207/FUL.
 - The development proposed is creation of a 3G Stadia Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, acoustic fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights, spectator stands, an access footpath and associated bund.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for creation of a 3G Stadia Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, acoustic fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, floodlights, spectator stands, an access footpath and associated bund at Fleetdown United Football Club, Heath Lane, Dartford, DA1 2QH in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/01207/FUL, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Mr Kevin Webb against Dartford Borough Council. That application is the subject of a separate decision.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are the effect of the proposed development on a) the character and appearance of the area with particular regard to the openness of the area; and b) the living conditions of neighbouring residents.

Reasons

Character and Appearance

4. The appeal site forms part of an area of open land known as Heath Lane Open Space (HLOS). The HLOS extends to just over 6 hectares and is bound on all sides by mainly residential development. The HLOS provides a mix of mown land, some of which is used as sports pitches, and more informal, treed areas.
5. The HLOS is also bounded and used by Fleetdown United Football Club. The Club currently occupies an existing clubhouse which has its own car park. Aside from the paraphernalia associated with the Club, there is also a small Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) that is enclosed by a high, mesh type fence. Although coloured green it does not block views across or through this AGP area. It is served by floodlighting columns.

6. The proposal would involve replacing an area of mown grass which is currently used as a football pitch with an AGP that would be enclosed by pitch and site perimeter fencing. The new pitch would be served by dugouts and stands as well as new floodlighting columns and maintenance container. A new path would connect the pitch to the clubhouse.
7. There is no doubt that the proposed development would result in a notable change to the land. However, given the nature of the proposed use, it would be complimentary to the existing sport/recreational use of the playing fields. As such, the proposal would not be a completely unexpected sight in a setting such as this one. Furthermore, most of the existing playing fields would remain unaltered and the existing informal, quieter areas of the HLOS would remain untouched.
8. The proposed AGP would be enclosed, and acoustic fencing would need to be erected at the northern end. However, for the most part it would still be possible to see through the non-acoustic fencing and between the stands, dugouts etc to the areas on the other side of the pitch.
9. There would be physical and visual separation between the AGP and the existing built form on the boundaries of the open space. This would provide sufficient space at either end of the AGP to allow members of the public to access other parts of the HLOS. Concerns have been raised regarding the HLOS becoming two separate areas and the AGP cutting off sightlines, which could have safety implications. However, given the information before me and my observations on site I am satisfied that the position of the AGP would not result in such harms arising.
10. The proposed fencing along the new footpath has also been modified to assist in this regard, with temporary fencing being used on match days for short periods of time. Therefore, I am satisfied that sufficient visual and physical connection between the HLOS on either side of the AGP would be maintained.
11. Whilst the proposed development would introduce enclosures and structures etc, I am satisfied that these have been positioned to minimise their wider effect. The dugouts would have Perspex covers and the stands would be open-sided. These pitch-side structures would all be below the height of the perimeter fencing around the site. The lighting columns would be tall but relatively narrow. They would each have two lights which would not be overly large. This would assist in minimising their overall visual prominence, particularly when not in use. I consider the impact of their use below.
12. Overall, I acknowledge that there would be some loss of openness to the HLOS. However, I am satisfied that the level of change is not so significant as to create harm to the overall character and appearance of the area.
13. The proposal therefore complies with Policy M1 of the Dartford Borough Local Plan 2024 (DBLP) which, among other things, seeks to ensure that new development is integrated with the public realm/open space.

Living Conditions

14. The concerns in relation to this main issue relate to the general level of noise and disturbance caused by the use of the AGP to nearby residents as well as any

associated impacts from increased parking demand on local roads when the facility is in use.

Noise and disturbance

15. The proposed AGP would be operational from 0800 hours to 2100 hours during the week and from 0800 hours until 1800 hours at the weekends. As exceptions to this, on two nights per week (Monday – Friday) the use could operate until 2200 hours and on 11 occasions during the year the pitch could be used until 2300 hours.
16. The proposal has been supported by a Noise Impact Assessment. This indicates that subject to certain mitigation measures, the AGP and its use would be noticeable but not intrusive in terms of noise.
17. The mitigation includes an acoustic fence along the northern perimeter of the pitch and provision of a Noise Management Plan (NMP). A draft NMP has been prepared, which also seeks to address possible disturbance associated with the use. It includes aspects such as people arriving/leaving the facility. It would therefore be possible to encompass the access and car parking arrangements within the NMP, a specific concern raised by the Council. In the interests of protecting the living conditions of the occupants of nearby properties, an appropriately worded planning condition to produce a NMP, which has to be agreed by the Council, is necessary.
18. The AGP would generate a range of intermittent noises whose tone and duration would not be consistent, and which could occur at times different to when the existing grass pitch is in use. However, the lack of an objection on this matter from the Council's Environmental Health Service is a material planning consideration and one on which I place significant weight.
19. External lighting will be introduced to an area that is largely unlit. However, given the current lighting to the existing AGP and car park areas as well as the light emitted from existing houses around the open space and street lighting in the surrounding area generally, this would not form an unduly incongruous feature. I am also mindful that there would not be light spill much beyond the AGP and that it would only be illuminated when it is operational and probably at only certain times of the year. These aspects could be controlled through a suitably worded planning condition.

Parking

20. There is general agreement between the main parties that the proposal would not generate levels of traffic that would have a harmful impact on the road network. This is because the AGP would normally be operating outside of peak traffic hours. Nonetheless, there is concern that the proposal could generate overspill car parking onto local roads.
21. The officer report to the Council's Development Control Board noted that the Heath Lane area was covered by a Dartford Town Centre Parking Study, which did not identify the area as being under parking stress. As such, parking controls were no longer being pursued in Heath Lane or the residential roads to the south.
22. The existing car park serving the Club is said to offer approximately 100 spaces, with a further 40 spaces available in an overflow area that would mainly be

available at weekends. For many occasions this is likely to be sufficient to deal with the potential uplift in use of the site. The submissions from the Council and local residents suggest that some overspill parking already occurs, particularly on match days. There are concerns that the improved facilities and increased use of the site will increase parking demand which in turn will have an adverse effect on local residents.

23. I do not doubt that there are instances when levels of parking demand may make finding available on-street parking difficult. On those occasions residents without on-site parking or who have more vehicles than available space would to some extent be inconvenienced by an increased competition for the available spaces. This would be likely to manifest itself in terms of taking longer to find a parking space, or residents having to park further away from their homes.
24. However, even if there were to be an increase in overspill parking the Council's own parking study indicates that the area generally does not suffer from parking stress and that there are no local on-street parking restrictions. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate that any additional on-street parking demand that could arise from the development would have an adverse effect on highway safety.
25. I also understand that sometimes the parking can be inconsiderate. However, given that there is sufficient parking capacity in the area, this would most likely be down to the individual drivers rather than an inherent lack of space generating this type of behaviour.
26. Whilst I acknowledge that there may be some inconvenience to local residents from additional parking demand, there is not sufficient evidence to indicate that this would amount to an unacceptable impact on their living conditions.

Findings

27. Given the findings of the NIA, the proposed mitigation measures and in the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary regarding noise, parking provision/demand in the area, I am unable to conclude that the development would result in an unacceptable effect on the living conditions of neighbouring residents.
28. Therefore, the proposal would comply with Policies M2, M15 and M16 of the DBLP which collectively and amongst other things, seek to ensure developments do not materially harm neighbouring uses, including through noise disturbance, intensity of use, and light pollution; and minimise travel and parking impacts.

Other Matters

29. Interested parties have raised various concerns relating to such matters as the impact on air quality, microplastics and wildlife. I have no substantive evidence before me to indicate that the scheme would harm air quality or that harm from microplastics would arise. The lighting scheme will be required to have regard to such matters as the sensitivity of the area to wildlife.
30. The issue of anti-social behaviour has also been raised. Such concerns can be material considerations but, in planning terms, the focus has to be the use of the land. Furthermore, there must be some reasonable evidential basis. Submissions linked solely to the characteristics of future users would not justify a refusal of permission. There is not a sufficiently robust evidential basis before me to

demonstrate that the proposed use would lead to anti-social behaviour or that residents' fears would undermine the existing quality of life in the local community.

31. I have no information to indicate that extending the existing AGP would be possible or achieve the required improvements. I have considered the proposal which is before me on the merits of the scheme and the material planning considerations, including those raised by interested parties. That some supporters of the scheme are not local to the site does not necessarily invalidate the points that they raise.
32. How the facility is to be funded is not a material planning consideration in my decision and beyond the remit of this appeal.

Conditions

33. I have had regard to the conditions set out in the Council's submissions and relevant guidance on the imposition of conditions. Both parties have had the opportunity to comment on the conditions. I have obtained the appellant's written agreement where it has been necessary to impose pre-commencement conditions.
34. In addition to the standard time limit, a condition specifying the approved plans is required in the interests of certainty.
35. To ensure the development functions as intended, conditions are required covering: pedestrian and maintenance access for vehicles into and around the site; a Management Scheme, the community use of the facility, details of the certification of the AGP, the installation of the acoustic fencing, provision of the bund, a lighting scheme and drainage details.
36. To protect the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers, there is a need for conditions addressing: construction hours, hours of operation, methods of working and provision of a construction management plan as well as a noise management plan.
37. To protect the character and appearance of the area, details of the bund and tree protection measures need to be provided.
38. Given the existing gas venting on the site, various conditions relating to this matter and contamination are necessary for the development to proceed.

Conclusion

39. For the reasons given above, having considered the development plan as a whole, along with all other relevant material considerations, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed subject to the conditions below.

Stewart Glassar

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 drawing numbers:

Site Location Plan	- 02 REV05
Proposed Site Plan	- 03 REV01
Proposed AGP Plan	- 04 REV 01
Proposed Elevation	- 05
Floodlighting Scheme	- 06
Proposed AGP Drainage Layout	- 07 REV01
Playing Field Layout	- 09
Topsoil Bund Sections	- 10
Infill Containment Measures	- 11
- 3) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, detailed existing and proposed sections across the site shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The information shall include:
 - a. Existing and proposed sections of the northern bund; and
 - b. Existing and proposed sections for all the areas where the existing embankment is to be cut into including but not limited to the access paths and spectator area.

Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 4) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, a gas risk assessment must be undertaken by a suitably qualified professional to determine the risk of gas migration to neighbouring properties as a result of the proposed development. Based on the findings of this gas risk assessment, a mitigation strategy (if required) must be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to commencement of the development.

Development shall be carried out in accordance with any approved mitigation strategy.
- 5) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, a remediation strategy to deal with the risks associated with contamination of the site in respect of the development hereby permitted, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. This strategy will include the following components:
 - a) A preliminary risk assessment which has identified:
 - all previous uses
 - potential contaminants associated with those uses
 - a conceptual model of the site indicating sources, pathways and receptors
 - potentially unacceptable risks arising from contamination at the site
 - b) A site investigation scheme, based on (a), to provide information for a detailed assessment of the risk to all receptors that may be affected, including those off-site.

c) The results of the site investigation and the detailed risk assessment referred to in (b) and, based on these, an options appraisal and remediation strategy giving full details of the remediation measures required and how they are to be undertaken.

d) A verification plan providing details of the data that will be collected in order to demonstrate that the works set out in the remediation strategy in (c) are complete and identifying any requirements for longer-term monitoring of pollutant linkages, maintenance and arrangements for contingency action. Any changes to these components require the written approval of the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented in full accord with the approved details.

6) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of pedestrian and maintenance access for vehicles into and around the site shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include

- a) Routes for maintenance vehicles including tractors for mowing;
- b) details of gradients and sloping on site including any necessary land level change to allow for vehicles to pass;
- c) pedestrian routes around the site and details of when access will be limited during matches.

The approved access routes shall be implemented and kept available for such use at all times. No development, whether permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), shall be carried out on that area of land or to preclude vehicular or pedestrian access thereto.

7) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, a Construction Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority shall include as a minimum, but not restricted to, the following:

- a) Routing details for construction and delivery traffic to/from the site;
- b) Details of provision for all site operatives, including visitors and construction vehicles, for parking and turning within the site during the construction period;
- c) Details of provision for all site operatives for the loading and unloading of plant, machinery and materials, to including the timings of deliveries and the types of delivery vehicle(s) to be used;
- d) Details of measures to prevent mud and other such material migrating onto the highway from all vehicles entering and leaving the site;
- e) Details of the provision of directional signage (on and off site);
- f) Details of measures to manage and minimise dust emissions;
- g) Details of the construction compound and that all materials, generators and items relating to the construction of the development will be exclusively located within this area

The construction works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

8) Prior to commencement of the development hereby permitted, details of the following shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority:

- a) Any tree protection measures to be erected around any hedgerow and trees to be retained, including its roots, in order to protect them from damage;
- b) How any trenches and other excavations will be backfilled before nightfall each day, and/or details of ramps to allow hedgehogs, badgers and foxes to easily exit;
- c) How and where building materials will be stored;
- d) Any work to vegetation/structures that may provide suitable bird nesting habitats should be carried out outside of the bird breeding season (1st March to 31st August inclusive) to avoid destroying or damaging bird nests in use or being built. If within the breeding bird season a survey by a suitably qualified person shall be conducted to confirm the absence of breeding birds, prior to commencing works;

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details

- 9) Any contamination that is found during the course of construction of the development hereby permitted that was not previously identified shall be reported immediately to the local planning authority. Development on the part of the site affected shall be suspended until a risk assessment has been carried out and submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Where unacceptable risks are found, the development not resume or continue until remediation and verification schemes have been carried out in accordance with details that shall first have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
- 10) Piling using penetrative methods shall not be carried out other than with the prior written approval of the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 11) Prior to the first use of the development hereby permitted, details of the use of the development by the community shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The agreed details shall include pricing policy, hours of use, access by non-members, management responsibilities and a mechanism for review. The development shall thereafter not be used otherwise than in strict compliance with the approved details.
- 12) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted a Management and Maintenance Scheme for the facility including management responsibilities, a maintenance schedule and a mechanism for review shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be operated in accordance with the approved Management and Maintenance Scheme.
- 13) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, a Noise Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be used in full accordance with the approved details.
- 14) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted a scheme for managing any borehole within the site installed for the investigation of soils, groundwater or geotechnical purposes shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The scheme shall provide details of how redundant boreholes are to be decommissioned and how any boreholes that need to be retained, post-development, for monitoring purposes will be secured, protected and inspected.

The scheme as approved shall be implemented prior to the first use of any part of the development.

- 15) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, a verification report demonstrating the completion of works set out in the approved remediation strategy (as required by condition 5) and the effectiveness of the remediation shall be submitted to, and approved in writing, by the local planning authority. The report shall include results of sampling and monitoring carried out in accordance with the approved verification plan to demonstrate that the site remediation criteria have been met.
- 16) Prior to the first use of the development hereby permitted, details of a 4m high acoustic barrier/fence on the northern boundary as shown on drawing no. Proposed AGP Plan 04 rev 01 and as detailed in the Noise Impact Assessment reference 11007/AW dated 20th of September 2024 shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include elevations. The density should be a minimum of 15 Kg/m². Such fencing shall be maintained for the lifetime of the development.
- 17) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted a planting scheme for the bund to the northern boundary shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The planting scheme shall be provided in accordance with the approved details prior to operation of the Artificial Grass Pitch and maintained in accordance with the approved details for the lifetime of the development.
- 18) No drainage systems for the infiltration of surface water to the ground are permitted other than with the written approval of the Local Planning Authority, with the exception of the soakaway located in the car park as shown on drawing number "proposed AGP drainage layout 07". Any proposals for such systems must be supported by an assessment of the risks to controlled waters. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
- 19) A sensitive lighting scheme as detailed within the lighting impact assessment (SSL, Sept 24) shall be fully implemented prior to first use of the development hereby permitted. Any changes must be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority prior to being implemented.
- 20) Prior to first use of the development hereby permitted, a verification report for the installed floodlighting shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall include evidence that the correct light levels have been achieved in accordance with the Sports Lighting Statement (SSL, Sept 2024).
- 21) The flood lighting hereby approved shall not be illuminated outside of the approved hours of use of the pitch as set out in condition 23.
- 22) Within 3 months of practical completion the following details shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority: (a) certification that the Artificial Grass Pitch hereby permitted has met the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf - FIFA Quality or equivalent International Artificial Turf Standard (IMS); and (b) confirmation that the facility has been registered on the Football Association's Register of Football Turf Pitches.
- 23) The Artificial Grass Pitch hereby permitted shall not be used outside of 0800 hours to 2100 hours (Mondays to Fridays); and 0800 hours to 1800 hours

(Saturdays and Sundays) with the exception of a maximum of 2 nights within a week (Monday - Friday) where the use may take place from 0800 hours to 2200 hours. As a further exception, on 11 other separate occasions annually the use of the Artificial Grass Pitch can continue after 2200 hours but must cease by 2300 hours.

***** END OF SCHEDULE *****