

ITEM NO: 6.6	<u>Location:</u>	The Playing Fields, Bury Lane, Codicote, Hitchin
	<u>Applicant:</u>	Codicote Parish Council
	<u>Proposal:</u>	Two storey sports hall and community centre with single storey store and plant room following demolition of existing sports and social club building (as amended by plan received 24.6.2008).
	<u>Ref.No:</u>	08/00330/ 1
	<u>Officer:</u>	John Chapman

Date of expiry of statutory period : 24 June 2008

Reason for Delay (if applicable)

Committee cycle

Reason for Referral to Committee (if applicable)

Site area greater than 1 hectare

1.0 Relevant History

- 1.1 Permission granted in 1980 for the use of land for playing fields and layout of access road, car parking areas, pavilion (260 sq. m) and store building (36 sq.m).
- 1.2 Outline permission granted in 1984 for the erection of a sports pavilion (434 sq. m) store and associated parking (landscaping being the only reserved matter). Phase 1 of this building has been built, which totals 177 sq. metres in area, and therefore this permission remains extant.
- 1.3 Permission granted in 1990 for a Scout and Guide headquarters building.
- 1.4 Temporary permission granted in 1991 for a detached building (255 sq.m) to be used as a function hall. This permission was subsequently renewed in 1996, 2001 and finally granted a permanent permission in 2003.
- 1.5 Permission refused in 1998 for a detached single storey building for youth club use on Green Belt policy grounds.
- 1.6 Permission granted in 2002 for the construction of additional tennis court and fencing.

2.0 Policies

- 2.1 Government Policy Advice
 - PPG 2 - Green Belts.
 - PPS 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.
 - PPG 16 - Archaeology and Planning.
 - PPG 17 - Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.
- 2.2 North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No 2 with Alterations

Policy 2 - Green Belt.
Policy 16 - Areas of Archaeological significance and other archaeological areas.
Policy 39 - Leisure Uses.
Policy 55 - Car Parking Standards/ Supplementary Planning Document : Vehicle Parking Provision at New Development.

3.0 Representations

- 3.1 Hertfordshire County Council (Head of Transportation Planning and Policy) -" does not wish to restrict the grant of permission. "
- 3.2 Hertfordshire County Council (Forward Planning Unit) - to be reported.
- 3.3 Hertfordshire County Council (Archaeology) - recommends the imposition of model condition 55 of Circular 11/95 should permission be granted. This states:
- " No demolition or development shall take place within the proposed development site until the applicant, or their agents, or their successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, which has been submitted to the planning authority and approved in writing. This condition shall only be considered to be discharged when the planning authority have received and approved archaeological reports of all the required archaeological works."
- 3.4 Sport England - consider the potential sports development benefits that the proposed sports hall would offer would clearly outweigh the detriment caused by the impact on the playing field. They therefore consider the proposal would meet exception E5 of their playing field policy and raise no objection to the application.
- 3.5 Site publicity/press notice/local residents - Cllr Bardett has written to state that " In line with the Codicote Parish Council, key community groups and the community at large the proposal has my full support."

4.0 Planning Considerations

4.1 Site & Surroundings

- 4.1.1 The application site is located at the northern edge of the village. An existing footpath provides pedestrian access from the main part of the village via St. Giles Road. To the west of this footpath is a wooden Scout and Guides building with a grassed area to the front and to the north of this building are tennis courts. Vehicle and pedestrian access exists from Bury Lane with car parking being sited to the east of the existing sports and social club building. To the north of the tennis courts is the changing room building and beyond and to the north of this and the sports and social club are the formal playing fields which are used for pitch sports. The existing sports and social club is single storey in height and measures approximately 24.5 metres in width, 10.4 metres in depth and 3 metres in height. Its overall volume is approximately 785 cubic metres.

4.2 Proposal

- 4.2.1 This application seeks permission for a sports and community centre building with a total floor area of approximately 1300 square metres. The main part of the building would measure 48.1 metres in width, 19.4 metres in depth and have a ridge height of approximately 10 metres, such that its overall volume would be over 9300 cubic metres. Attached to the southern wall of the main building it is proposed to build a pitched roof store and plant room with a floor area of 96 square metres, measuring 21.8 metres in width, 4.4 metres in depth and with a ridge height of 5.5 metres.

The main part of the building would be used as a sports hall with a floor area, measuring 34 metres in width and 18.1 metres in depth internally, to provide 4 badminton courts or a full size 5-a-side football pitch. To the western end of the building it is proposed to provide accommodation, with a floor area of approximately 275 square metres at both ground and first floor level. The ground floor would consist of changing rooms, toilets, office, youth club room, disabled w.c/shower, viewing area and lobby whilst at first floor level there would be a large function room with bar and associated kitchen and cellar areas, smaller function room/viewing gallery and toilets. A metal escape staircase is proposed to the western elevation of the building.

4.2.2 The building is designed to have a barn-like appearance with brickwork at ground floor level to a height of 3.15 metres, timber boarding above this for a further height of 5.25 metres to the parapet of the building and a light coloured profiled metal roof (with mesh at the parapet to prevent balls getting lost on the roof). Natural slates are proposed to be used on the pitched roof store and plant room.

4.3 Key Issues

4.3.1 Prior to considering the key planning issues to the determination of this application I consider it is appropriate to explain the planning history of this site, which has led to the submission of this application.

4.3.2 In this respect members will note that the original permission granted in 1980 included a pavilion with a floor area of 260 sq. metres. Subsequently, a larger pavilion of 434 sq.metres was granted but due, I understand, to funding issues only the first phase (the changing rooms) of the development were built, with the expectation that when the finance was available the rest of this building would be completed. After several years it became apparent to the Parish Council that the finances to build the second phase of the 1984 permission had and were unlikely to be achieved unless additional revenue could be generated. As a result an application for a temporary function room building was submitted which, together with other grants that were being pursued at that time, the Parish Council felt would facilitate the second phase being built during the next 5 years. However, whilst sympathetic to the basis for its submission, the officer recommendation was that the proposal was unacceptable in Green Belt policy terms, as a result of the harm it would cause to the openness of the Green Belt, both from its siting and utilitarian appearance. Notwithstanding the officer recommendation members felt that " very special circumstances " had been presented and that a temporary five year permission was appropriate, and this would allow the necessary finances to be generated and put in place so that the remainder of the development granted by the 1984 permission could then be completed. By 1996 sufficient finances had still not been raised from the function hall facilities, or any grants been achieved, to allow the extant permission to be completed. It was therefore decided that a further temporary permission should be granted. In 2001 the same problems were still persisting and so a further temporary permission was granted. In 2003 it was decided that a permanent permission should be granted to the building.

4.3.3 Having set out the background planning history of the site nevertheless this application needs to be considered on its own planning merits having regard to the current policies relevant to the site. Accordingly, the key issue to the determination of this application is therefore whether the development is acceptable in Green Belt policy terms or, if not, whether " very special circumstances " exist for allowing a relaxation of the normal policy. In addition, the impact of the development upon the openness of the Green Belt and the need for financial contributions toward sustainable transport objectives also need to be assessed.

4.3.4 Insofar as the first issue is concerned advice at paragraph 3.4 of PPG 2 states that " The construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for the following purposes:

- essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it (see paragraph 3.5 below)."

Paragraph 3.5 goes on to state " Essential facilities should be genuinely required for use of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. Possible examples of such facilities include small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or small stables for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation. "

4.3.5 Having regard to the above advice it is clear that the proposed development represents " inappropriate development." It is therefore necessary to consider whether " very special circumstances " exist to allow a relaxation of the normal Green Belt policy. In this respect I consider that such circumstances do exist, insofar as the principle of such facilities being acceptable are concerned. In reaching this conclusion I consider that points 3 and 4 of the Design and Access Statement which has been submitted by the Parish Council, and which is reproduced as an Appendix to this report, are persuasive. However, whilst accepting the need for much larger sports facilities than had previously been anticipated (so as to provide the required badminton courts/indoor football pitch/sports hall), and which may be considered at the limits of being appropriate in terms of the openness of the Green Belt, I consider it is even more important that the scale of the ancillary facilities are of a minimum size commensurate with Green Belt policy objectives.

4.3.6 In this respect the existing function room is approximately 255 sq. metres in area, whereas the floor area of the ancillary facilities to be added to the sports hall would be over 350 sq. metres in area, an increase of approximately 40%. However, of even greater concern is that whilst the existing building is only 3 metres in height the proposed ancillary facilities would be provided within two storeys of accommodation and be nearly 10 metres in height. As a result of concerns raised over the visual impact of the building upon the openness of the Green Belt the applicants were therefore requested to consider rationalising the ancillary facilities and reducing their size or amending the layout and design of the building to allow a lower roof height and reduce the bulk of the building. In response to this request the Parish Council commented as follows:

" During your visit you asked us to consider reducing the size of the building by removing the reception/office, youth club and lobby areas and putting the second storey facilities on the ground floor but without a second set of toilets. You suggested we move the office and youth club across beside the existing changing rooms where we have an outstanding planning permission to extend.

We have taken time to consider these suggestions in consultation with our architect and have come to the following conclusions:-

1. We need a reception/office at the entrance to the building to control traffic coming in and out of the building and to run the sports hall programme safely and effectively.

2. We want the youth club in the sports hall building so that we can get the children involved in sport in the new centre.

3, Having all the facilities on the ground floor level would look like a flat roof extension to the sports hall and even if a false pitched roof was put on top of this , it would look odd and spoil the architectural integrity of the whole building.

4. We would lose an excellent feature at our present plans to be able to view all the sporting activity from the second floor.

5. Moving the reception/office and youth club next to the changing rooms would be not only impractical but also more expensive to build and run."

4.3.7 Whilst I understand the reasons put forward by the Parish Council I am unable to accept that the scale of the function rooms or the provision of the youth club is appropriate in terms of safeguarding Green Belt policy applicable to this site. In this respect I consider the size of the function rooms and the lobby area are unacceptable and should be reduced in size. In addition, whilst the youth club would be more appropriate in Green Belt policy terms to be located within the building for which an extant permission exists, if members agree with the Parish Council's view I maintain that in policy terms there is no reason why this facility cannot double up with the function room use, as presumably, it does at present. Should these suggestions be agreed it would then allow the scale and bulk of the ancillary facilities to be reduced to a size appropriate to the objectives of Green Belt policy. Furthermore, in reaching this conclusion I am conscious of the planning permission granted to Knebworth Parish Council which has provided a community area ancillary to the sports pavilion of only 50 sq. metres. A current application at Whitwell Recreation Ground proposes a communal area of 60 sq. metres. The community facilities (youth club room and function rooms with ancillary facilities) proposed as part of this application are approximately 300 sq metres.

4.3.8 However, my greatest concern over this element of the scheme relates to its height. Whilst it is necessary for the Sports Hall to be nearly 10 metres high there is no reason or justification why this part of the development could not be made more subservient and less dominant in terms of its scale, bulk and height.

4.3.9 For this reason I am unable to support the current scheme and feel that an alternative building design should be considered, following a rationalisation of the ancillary facilities, thereby resulting in this part of the building not having such a profound impact upon the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy, which is to maintain its openness. Furthermore, in such a sensitive location, close to the excluded village boundary of Codicote, and on land from which this building would be highly visible from longer views to the north, this is of even greater importance.

4.3.10 Turning to the second issue the Council now requires that developments such as that proposed should make a financial contribution, based on the Council's car parking standards applied to the particular use. toward sustainable transport objectives. In this case a total of 73 spaces are required for the proposed building and existing facilities, whereas presently there are 52 parking spaces available. Normally, a financial contribution of 21 x £500 (£11,500) would therefore be required in this instance. However, the Parish Council do not intend to increase the number of parking spaces " as they wish to encourage users of the Sports Hall and community facilities to arrive by foot or bicycle, in support of the Green as well as keep fit agendas." Since existing parking facilities would therefore not be increased, that to do so would harm Green Belt policy objectives and given the budgetary concerns raised by the Parish Council should this provision be considered necessary I have concluded that in this instance it is not appropriate for additional car parking to be required. As a result in this case I consider there can be no justification for a financial contribution to be made toward sustainable transport objectives.

4.4 **Conclusion**

4.4.1 Whilst I consider the " very special circumstances "advanced in support of this application justify the need for a large sports hall facility which would have a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt I do not consider that the ancillary facilities can be justified in Green Belt policy terms. In this respect I consider the community facilities could be more satisfactorily accommodated, in policy terms, by redesigning this element of the scheme or utilising less visually

harmful development which may still be built under the extant permission for this site. Accordingly, I consider the proposal would create a development which would result in significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt and is therefore unacceptable in terms of the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy. Insofar as the second issue is concerned I consider it is appropriate to support the concept of encouraging leisure facilities to be accessed by modes of transport other than the car. For this reason, and that as a result car parking provision would not increase from that which already exists for lesser development on the site, I do not consider that sustainable transport contributions should be required in this case.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 In making decisions on applications submitted under the Town and Country Planning legislation, the Council is required to have regard to the provisions of the development plan and to any other material considerations. The decision must be in accordance with the plan unless the material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the decision is to refuse or restrictive conditions are attached, the applicant has a right of appeal against the decision.

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 That planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reason:
1. The application site is within an area designated in the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan no.2 with Alterations as Green Belt, within which there is a presumption against inappropriate development, such as that proposed, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. In the view of the Local Planning Authority the proposal is not supported by such circumstances. Moreover, by reason of the scale, bulk and height of the ancillary facilities the proposed building would harm the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy which seeks to maintain the openness of the area. As such, the proposal would not accord with the provisions of Policy 2 of the District Local Plan no.2 with Alterations 1996 or the provisions of PPG2 - Green Belt.