



JOINT AREA COMMITTEES IN SOUTH SOMERSET
Officer Report On Planning Application:
09/03087/FUL

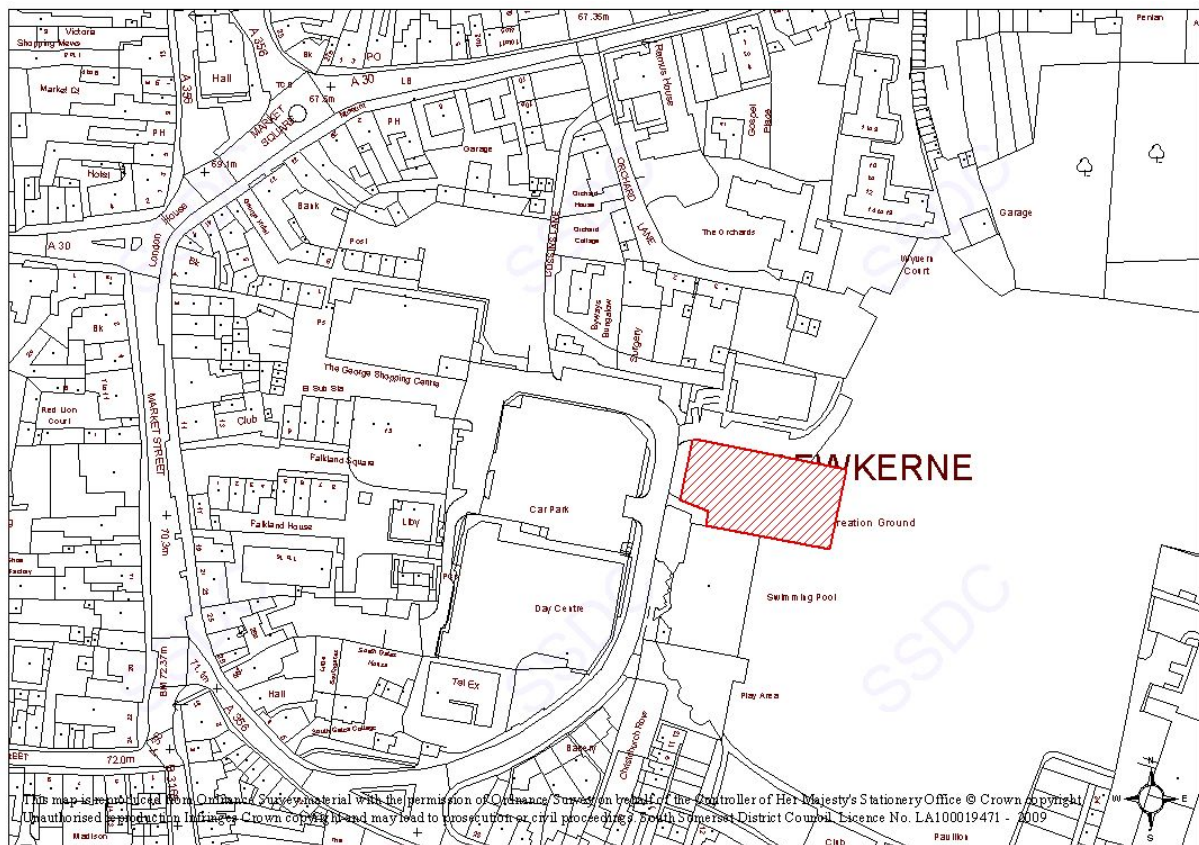


Proposal :	The construction of a two storey sports centre and community centre (GR: 344363/109664)
Site Address:	Recreation Ground Henhayes Lane Crewkerne
Parish:	Crewkerne
Ward (SSDC Members)	CREWKERNE TOWN: Geoff Clarke (Cllr), Mike Best (Cllr), Angie Singleton (Cllr)
Division (SCC Member)	CREWKERNE: John Dyke (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	Andrew Gunn Tel: (01935) 462192 Email: andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	1st October 2009
Applicant :	Crewkerne Town Council
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Tom Gascoyne, Mark Orme Architects Street Somerset BA16 OEH
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The Chair has requested that this application is brought to the Joint Area West Committee to enable consideration of the various planning issues and due to the considerable level of public interest in this application.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



The site is located on the western side of the Henhayes recreation ground, close to the town centre. To the north of the proposed building is the Henhayes Centre, to its immediate west a Lucombe Oak, and to the south west, the Aqua Centre. The recreation ground, that includes football, rugby and cricket pitches are located to the east. Existing changing rooms and a sports function room is located along the southern boundary of the recreation ground. The recreation ground is owned by the Town Council and the Crewkerne Sports Club leases land from the Town Council.

This application seeks consent for the erection of a 2 storey sports and community centre, located at the Henhayes Recreation Ground, Crewkerne.

The development will replace existing changing rooms and a sports club that are currently located along the southern boundary of the recreation ground. The existing facilities currently comprise 2 buildings and 2 steel container storage units. One of the buildings is a timber framed building owned by the sports club and contains a bar, skittle alley and club room. This is in poor condition and uninsulated. The second building provides changing rooms and showers. Again, the building is in poor condition and, importantly does not meet the latest requirements of the Rugby Football Union and Football Association. Thus, there is a need to replace these buildings and to provide up-to date facilities. A new building is therefore proposed to accommodate these users.

In addition, the building is also proposed to accommodate current users of the West One Community building in Crewkerne. Users of this building include playgroups, out of school club and youth groups. The supporting documents outline that this building is in need of repair, including a new roof and internal works.

The new building will be located to the north east of the Aquacentre and to the east of the Lucombe Oak. The building will be located on land that is currently part tarmac, part grassed and part grasscrete (part of an approved turning area). The building will have a ridge height of 8.1 metres and measure 25.3 metres x 17.5 metres. As viewed from the recreation ground, the building will extend 3 metres to the north west (forward) of the Aqua Centre. There will be a distance of 3.2 metres from the north east corner of the Aqua Centre to the south west corner of the new building. The western elevation of the building will be located around 3 metres from the canopy edge of the Lucombe Oak.

On the ground floor, the building will provide 4 changing rooms (2 x 20 person + 2 x 16 person), 2 x junior changing rooms, a crèche, playschool, toilets, storage space, an entrance foyer, reception, seating/circulation space and a lift. The layout and scale of the changing rooms have been designed to accord with the sports requirements of the governing bodies. The first floor will provide a bar, function hall, kitchen, toilets, storage and a spectator balcony.

Vehicular access to the new building will be gained via the access road off the A356 which leads to the existing car parks, one of which is the temporary car park to the east of the Henhayes Centre. The existing footpaths will be retained with new asphalt paving leading to the main entrance along the western elevation. Asphalt paving will also extend around two thirds of the northern elevation along with some grasscrete blocks. Grasscrete blocks will be installed alongside the eastern elevation of the new building. The building will be constructed using a mix of timber cladding, red bricks with a profiled metal sheet roof.

The south west corner of the new building will encroach into the existing embankment along the eastern elevation of the Aqua Centre. The embankment will be retained at this point but will be extended, remodelled and realigned along the whole of the southern elevation of the new building. A gap will be created within part of the enlarged embankment to create access for participants in football, rugby and cricket from the recreation ground to the changing rooms entrance in the southern elevation.

2 disabled parking spaces and cycle racks will be provided to the north west of the building. Additional planting will be undertaken to the north west of the building with the Lucombe Oak being retained as the focal point of the landscaping on the western side of the building. A post

and rail fence will be erected around the boundary of the landscaped area to the west of the building with bark mulch placed under the canopy of the tree.

The original layout plan has been amended to incorporate a revised vehicular turning area for buses that bring people to the Henhayes Centre and Aqua Centre. This is required because the building will occupy the southern part of the approved turning head - this is currently the grasscrete block area to the immediate east of the Lucombe Oak. The revised turning area will be constructed using grasscrete blocks and will extend a distance of 35 metres, starting 4.5 metres before the western elevation of the new building, extending 12 metres beyond the eastern elevation of the new building and extending 28 metres northwards, ending 1 metre past the north east corner of the Henhayes Centre. The Highway Authority are satisfied with the revised turning head.

HISTORY

09/01500/FUL - The construction of a two storey sports and community centre (application withdrawn July 2009).

There have been various other applications involving development on the recreation ground in relation to the temporary car park, the construction of the Henhayes Centre, floodlighting and works to the existing sports facilities.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise,

Relevant Development Plan Documents

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West (RPG10) (adopted September 2001)
VIS 1 - Expressing the Vision.
VIS2 - Principles of Future Development
Policy TCS2 - Culture, Leisure and Sport.

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (adopted April 2000)
STR2 - Towns
Policy 21 - Town Centre Uses.
Policy 37 - Sport and Recreation Facilities.
Policy 43 - Access for people with disabilities
Policy 49 - Transport Requirements of New Development.

South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006)
ST3 - Development Areas
ST9 - Crime Prevention.
TP3 - Cycle Parking
MC4 - Other uses in Town Centres
MC5 - Location of Non-shopping Key Town Centre Uses.
CR1 - Existing Playing Fields/Recreation Areas.

PPS's/PPG's
PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development
PPG17 - Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy
Goal 3 - Healthy and Active
Goal 8 - Quality Development

Other Relevant documents:

ODPM document 'Safer Places - The Planning System and Crime Prevention' (2004).

CONSULTATIONS

Town Council:

The Town Council are the applicants for this application.

Local Highway Authority (original comments):

This current proposal is seeking to relocate the existing sports facilities. Given the existing location some vehicles make use of Henhayes Lane as a means of access. Henhayes Lane is substandard by reason of its restricted width, poor alignment and restricted level of visibility at its junction with the A356 and its use is of concern to the Highway Authority. The proposal to relocate the facilities as shown on the submitted plan is likely to result in a reduction in the use made of Henhayes Lane, which would be beneficial to highway safety.

Local Highway Authority (comments following submission of amended plan regarding revised location of turning head):

As you are aware the Highway Authority raised concerns that the proposed location of the building would have impacted upon the existing turning and parking arrangements serving the existing Day Centre. As a consequence, it was requested that a plan be submitted providing an altered turning arrangement. The amended turning area shown on the submitted plan is still a little tight and does not quite represent what was agreed on site. The turning area needs to be extended further to the east by approximately 5.0m. If this detail is provided I can confirm that the Highway Authority will have no objection to the proposal.

Additional Highway Authority comments following receipt of revised amended plan:

In response to the amended plan submitted relating to the above I have the following comments.

The proposed turning area shown on the submitted plan is now of sufficient dimension to enable larger vehicles in connection with the existing Day Centre and Aqua Centre to enter and leave in a forward gear. As a result, I would advise you that there is now no objection to the proposal from a highway point of view.

However, in the event of permission being granted I would recommend that the following conditions be imposed:

1. The development hereby permitted, shall not be first brought into use until the turning space shown on the submitted plan, drawing No. 362_003 has been properly consolidated and surfaced. Such turning space shall be kept clear of obstructions at all times.
2. The gradient of the proposed turning area shall not at any point be steeper than 1 in 10.

Other

Council Landscape Architect (original comments):

I note the scope of this latest application, and am familiar with the site. I have previously had some limited input to the lengthy pre-application process, and recently provided detailed comment upon the preceding application - 09/01500 - much of which remains pertinent with this revised proposal.

At the initial stages of this project's evolution, and relative to Crewkerne's longer-term development, I provided landscape input that indicated the preferred locations for a potential sports centre to be;

- 1) a continued use of the Henhayes Lane site, as it is already characterised by built form, and offers the potential to create a quality frontage to Henhayes Field at its southern end;
- 2) a site to the south of Wyvern Court, yet inside a potential roadline into land at the back of East Street, to positively relate to a pattern of development and recreational growth envisioned by the 'Enquiry by Design' exercise, which was conducted within the town by the Prince's Trust in 2005, and;
- 3) a site location on the northeast side of the playing field (which would need 3rd party agreement) cognisant of the local plan intention to extend formal recreation facilities to the south of Easthams Lane (allocation CR/CREW7).

There was no landscape support for a building in the general location of the current application, for there is a potential for;

- a) a negative impact upon the Lucombe Oak;
- b) the reduction of the visual link between the town centre and Henhayes, and;
- c) an obtrusion of the building into Henhayes Field.

My site preferences remain as stated from the outset, but I note from the Design and Access Statement that site (1) is discounted due to limitations upon vehicular access, whilst site (2) is viewed as having a potential for a negative impact upon adjacent residential amenity. Site (3) is not included in any review of alternative sites, and with 3rd party land involved, it is clear that the time frame to further this option doesn't coincide with the programme set out for this application. Hence it appears that if the building is to encompass the full range of uses envisaged in the Centre's business plan - which I note is for more than just sports usage - then this general location may be the only option before the town council at this time.

Turning to the current application, the landscape concerns remain as listed a-c above. Looking at these in detail;

- a) The previous application intended the removal of the Lucombe Oak, following an independent tree report detailing an extent of root decay, and concerns of stability. We now have another report that provides some comfort on the tree's stability, and the town council has agreed its retention, with the result that the sports centre will now be shifted east, to lay outside the tree's RPA (root protection area). I view this with mixed feelings: The Conservation Unit has long sought for better protection and management of the Lucombe Oak, and this appears to have been secured, and that is a positive. Conversely, by relocating the Sports Centre to the location subject of this application, the setting of the Oak is substantially compromised, for it is now hemmed in all sides by a mix of buildings, structures, and other trees, which clearly devalues its presence.
- b) There has long been a visual link between the town centre, and Henhayes field, and arguably, this is a characteristic of the town's Conservation area. In recent years, this 'link' has been narrowed, initially by the construction of the Henhayes Centre, and second by the construction of the multi-storey car park, which whilst not reducing the physical gap between the Henhayes and Aqua Centres, does serve to narrow the view of the field from the town centre's public spaces and rights of way. As such, the main lines of view through this gap are primarily limited to those gained from the north and northeast side of the multi-storey car park, between the Co-op car park entrance, and the north end of the Aqua Centre. This is a limited visual receptor, thus in terms of the extent of visibility, does not carry great weight. Conversely, that does not discount the value of this gap to the town, for the space is an integral component of the character of the Town centre/Henhayes interface, and it has cultural value to the local community, which is a legitimate concern of landscape character considerations.

If the Sports Centre is sited as per this application, the visual link will be substantially eroded: The current views across Henhayes Field, toward the town's Conservation Area as expressed by the buildings on the field 's southeast side (Henhayes Lane Terrace and the former Webbing Factory) will effectively be lost from the vantage

points noted above. The sense of town centre linkage with its green space is thus diminished. From a cultural perspective, I consider this an erosion of local landscape character, and as such this is viewed as a negative landscape impact.

- c) Due to the retention of the Lucombe Oak, this latest Sports Centre proposal now projects further east into Henhayes Field than did the previous application, some 20+ metres beyond the building line of the Aqua Centre. In this respect, it is at variance with the order and pattern of the buildings along the field's west edge, and somewhat dominant of the Henhayes Centre. The eastward projection also results in an erosion of the width of the Field, between the current building frontage and the employment/Conservation Area to the east. This impact is exaggerated by the large east elevation, a result of the above-average first floor roof height, and the lower level of the field relative to the Sports Centre ground floor level (circa 1.0 metre - and not expressed on the drawings). Whilst the building location may have a credible arrangement relative to the adjacent car park, my understanding is that this parking location is temporary, and will be returned to grass, thus is not a factor in the consideration of this application.

To summarise;

- 1) from a landscape perspective, this is not a preferred location;
- 2) whilst the Lucombe oak is retained, its setting is degraded;
- 3) the visual link between the town and Henhayes Field is substantially eroded, and;
- 4) relative to context, building scale and placement is obtrusive.

Setting the cumulative weight of these concerns alongside the design criteria of policy ST6, I am not convinced that this application meets objectives 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8. Consequently there is a basis for a landscape objection to the location of this proposal.

Should you decide to recommend this application for approval, then I would advise we seek;

- a) an amendment to the external layout, to ensure direct pedestrian linkage to Henhayes Field on the south-side of the access road link. This can be achieved without negative impact upon the Lucombe Oak;
- b) a change to the materials on the centre's west elevation, seeking lighter tones to combat the heavy shading effect of both Aqua Centre and the evergreen Lucombe Oak upon the area to the west of the new centre/north of the Aqua Centre, and;
- c) a revision of the landscape proposal - whilst the Lucombe oak remains standing, I would not advocate further tree planting in the space between the oak and the sports centre. A simple solution that allows for the mulch finish required below the oak to run up to an area of high quality paving serving the centre's entrance, will suffice.

Council Landscape Architect: (Additional comments following receipt of amended plans):

In itself, this turning head is a minor addition to the overall development impact. However, by providing such a functional highways solution that requires vehicles to run further into the recreation ground simply to turn around, the poor choice of site location is further underlined.

Conservation Manager:

In order to record the theme of our various discussions, I would add my concern about this proposal with reference to

- 1. The lack of proper planning for Henhayes. This area of Crewkerne is very special and of great benefit to the town. This and the land beyond the sports field between Blacknell Lane and Easthams Road leading on up to the key site represents a huge opportunity but, as was pointed out during the Enquiry by Design on the key site, desperately needs to be the subject of careful advanced planning. Without proper planning decisions taken incrementally will undo opportunity and long-term potential benefits. I had understood that the ABCD Group were to commission an Urban

Development Framework that would guide decision making and help achieve the best potential for these areas. This is really needed so that desirable facilities such as that proposed can be located in the most appropriate places.

2. The inappropriate location of this proposed building. Siting the building within the 'strategic gap' in the built frontage to Henhayes field is quite inappropriate. This is significant for the effective connection between the field (and the land beyond) and the town centre. Building across this could adversely affect the potential of this area as identified above. Of further concern is the siting intruding into the open space beyond the frontage formed by the Aqua Centre, understandably trying to avoid the protected tree but thoroughly perverse, visually intrusive and harmful to the function and character of the open space. If allowed now will I think be regretted in the future.
3. The contrast in height with the adjacent new day centre. This is considerable and would result in the new sports centre being excessively dominant. Although lower than the Aqua Centre this is an issue resulting partly from its position and partly its blocky form, which contrasts with the subtler roof forms of both adjacent structures.

Clearly this facility is desirable and needs to be planned for. The problem of its siting has arisen from the failure to plan properly effective land use around the field. The extension to the Aqua Centre has blocked access to the south side of the field.

Environmental Health:

No objections raised.

Sport England:

In commenting on any planning applications referred to us as a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting playing fields, we assess whether the proposal meets any of the 5 exceptions to our Playing Field Policy 'A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England' (available at: http://www.sportengland.org/facilities__planning/putting_policy_into_practice/playing_fields.aspx). If we do not consider any of the exceptions apply, then we will oppose the development. Our policy relates to all or any part of a playing field or land last used as a playing field, or land allocated for use as a playing field in an adopted or draft deposit local plan.

I understand that the Recreation Ground accommodates three adult size pitches for rugby, football and cricket, along with two buildings used by the sports club. The main building is timber framed, and contains the clubroom, bar and skittles alley (built in the 1970's) and a smaller building contains the changing rooms and showers (built in the 1960's).

The proposal is to provide a new pavilion and community centre to the north-east of the Aqua Centre, partly on land which is currently used as playing field. I have visited the site, and am aware that the area of playing field on which the proposed building is to be sited currently forms part of the cricket outfield. Also, the proposed building would encroach into the safety margin of the existing football pitch (the by-line of the pitch is within about 2m of the south-east edge of the building).

I note (from drawing no. 382_001) that the following measures are also proposed aimed at addressing the above points:

- The senior football pitch is to be re-aligned away from the proposed building. This will mean a slight reduction in its dimensions (to 93.66m x 49.16m including safety margins) - these dimensions are in accordance with the Football Association's recommended dimensions for a senior sized pitch.
- The cricket outfield boundary is to be shortened along its western side. However, drawing no. 382_001 shows the revised dimensions as meeting the England and Wales Cricket Board's recommended pitch size for a senior, 6 pitch facility. Please note that the

temporary car park to the north of the proposed building encroaches onto the revised cricket outfield - Sport England will be commenting separately on the application to retain the car park for a further temporary period.

- In order to compensate for the loss of part of the playing field (ie the site of the proposed building) it is proposed to provide a mini-soccer pitch on the site of the existing club buildings, following their demolition.

I consider that Exception E5 of Sport England's Playing Field Policy would be most applicable to the proposal:

"E5: The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields."

I have therefore assessed how the proposals relate to Exception E5 of our Playing Field Policy. In order for us not to oppose the reduction in playing field area, we would wish to see confirmation that the following mitigation measures are secured, either by way of planning conditions or as part of a Section 106 Planning Obligation attached to any planning consent that is granted, in order that the overall proposals satisfy the requirements of E5 of our Playing Field Policy.

1. Provision of a mini-soccer pitch on the site of the existing club buildings.

As noted above, drawing no. 382_001 indicates that a mini-soccer pitch (45.75m x 27.45m) is to be provided on the site of the existing club buildings, following their demolition. This will compensate for the loss of part of the playing field (ie the site of the proposed new building). Sport England considers that this should be seen as being an integral part of the overall 'mitigation package'. We would therefore wish to ensure that this replacement pitch meets our technical standards for grass pitches, in terms of layout, gradient, drainage, etc, and as such is 'fit for purpose'. We would request that the following requirement is secured (either by planning condition or Section 106 Planning Obligation) as part of any planning approval that is given in relation to this application:

Condition: Prior to the commencement of development, details of the proposed layout and specification of the mini-soccer pitch (to be located on the site of the existing club buildings) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, in consultation with Sport England. The layout and specification of the pitch shall comply with Sport England Technical Design Guidance Note 'Natural Turf for Sport'. The pitch shall be provided within 12 months of the occupation of the new sports centre and community centre.

Reason: To ensure the replacement playing pitch is fit for purpose and to accord with Sport England/LDF Policy.

In the light of the above comments, I can confirm that, provided the above requirement is included either as planning conditions or as part of a Section 106 Planning Obligation attached to any planning consent that is granted, Sport England does not wish to object to this application, as we would be satisfied that the proposed development meets Exception E5 of our Playing Field Policy.

Please note that the above comments relate to planning and design issues only and do not represent Sport England's response to any current or future application for funding.

Economic Development Team Leader:

General

The principle of replacing three old buildings with one modern building must make both economic and community sense. A simple map showing the locations of existing buildings and proposed new building would be a great help to understanding the project.

The project will provide much needed sports, youth and nursery facilities.

The local community is behind the project, as are the local sports clubs.

Bringing facilities together under one, centrally located "hub" makes perfect sense and will allow "cross-fertilisation" of various services provided.

The grants available at present, mainly through the Waitrose development, make this the ideal time to progress the project.

However, as a Business Plan, the content lacks robust evidence, in particular with regards to the financial information and demand.

Financial:

Capital costs.

The only mention of the capital costs of the project are to be found in the Crewkerne Town Council news dated May 2009. This states that the project will cost between £800,000 and £850,000. It is not clear where this figure comes from. Additionally this article states that certain pledges have been made to the project.

The Business Plan needs to very carefully laid out and break down all construction costs for the project. (This has probably been carried out as a Quantity Surveyor has been used on the project and funded through SSDC).

Where this money comes from also needs to be fully recorded together with comments as to the certainty of each pledge. This would then clearly identify the shortfall in capital funding and the risk associated with each pledge.

This could then lead to "sensitivity of design", i.e. what could the building do without if funding was not forthcoming, or what could be added to the building if further funding was secured.

The funding is heavily dependent upon the sale of the West One building. The plan needs more detail on the suggested sale price and the certainty of receiving that figure for the building in the current economic climate.

Revenue.

The plan states that figures "are based on" running the current buildings but no robust figures are presented. This information will undoubtedly supply a very good indication of what demand exists within Crewkerne for these services.

For instance: How many staff are currently employed at the three centres to be merged? What are on-going maintenance costs of the three locations? What are the three business rates liability?

Grants are put in as income for the first three years. What happens after that?

Rent is payable as an expenditure. Who receives this? Could the project get a rent-free period?

Salaries appear low considering the on-costs such as NI, Pension etc.

The spreadsheet supplied lacks detail, in particular in the first year. As with any new business, income needs to build up and a month by month spreadsheet needs to be submitted which will show how much cash is needed (cashflow) in the first 12 months.

Would like to see a more detailed breakdown of the bar receipts of some £58,000 per annum. This relates to about £5,000 per month. If this just relates to drink, then a breakdown of number of customers etc. needs to be thought through.

Income contributions from the organisations and private hire for use of the facilities seems low. The annual fees income to the building generated from the Cricket Club and Crèche amount to less than a pound a day each! The Rugby and Football Clubs contribution is less than ten pounds a week. This compares to an annual rent for the facilities of £16,000. Any business model should have sufficient income generated by the members to cover the core costs, in this instance the rent.

There has been no allowance for contingency (usually 10%). Statutory testing has been covered in part, fire extinguishers and legionella are both missing from the cashflow forecast. These could easily be £1,000 per annum combined.

Staff costs are extremely low. A provision of £18,000 equates to a salary of £14,000 plus on-costs (National Insurance, Inland Revenue and pension contributions). I would question if this is sufficient salary to attract the appropriately skilled staff to manage the facility.

Management of the Centre.

The usage by a number of parties is to be encouraged. However, with such a wide range, differing views will almost certainly be forthcoming.

A structured approach to the make up of the committee must be implemented from day one, whereby participants views are heard, but the management is not too cumbersome. A strong Chairperson is essential.

A more detailed make up of the management of the Centre is needed, together with CVs of proposed committee members.

Additionally, the Centre Manager will be crucial to the running, and an outline job spec should be provided.

Summary

The project overall has been well researched and is clearly required in Crewkerne. The budget needs more attention, particularly as so much reliance is being placed on the income generated from the bar.

Officer comment:

The above comments from the economic officer were forwarded to the agent who then forwarded them to the group who formulated the business plan. They have accepted Mr Tucker's comments and will revise and update the business plan accordingly. An oral update will be given at Committee with regard to any revised business plan received.

Tree Officer:

I have concerns that have been previously expressed within previous consultations.

Those concerns included the possibility of the Lucombe Oak acting as a distracting 'red herring', in that the other trees immediately adjoining the site do not appear to have been surveyed, categorised or considered.

I also need to consider if the Lucombe Oak itself has been objectively categorised in accordance with BS 5837: 2005 - Trees in relation to construction.

Tree Officer - Additional comments:

In accordance with British Standard 5837: 2005; Trees in relation to construction - Recommendations: I remain consistent in my views that I categorise the Lucombe Oak as a 'Category R' tree - "Those in such a condition that any existing value would be lost within 10 years and which should, in the current context, be removed for reasons of sound arboricultural management".

As I have stated before, I still remain concerned that the other trees adjoining the proposal do not appear to have been considered.

I object to the proposal on the basis that it seeks to unsustainably retain the tree as a key feature within a built environment, the lifespan of which is likely to far exceed the safe useful life expectancy of the tree.

Council Engineer:

Looking at proposals for the above I am concerned about the traffic arrangements in the access road. I'm still uncertain about the general parking provision for users of this facility and there seems to be little or no reference to this in the submission. Presumably they are expecting people to use the adjacent public car park as users of the Aqua Centre currently do.

What concerns me more is that the proposed building will occupy a significant amount of the existing turning area at the end of the access road. This could give rise to problems for coaches turning around as they currently do in order to deliver/collect children from the Aqua Centre. Presumably there will also be coaches for visiting sports teams although I don't know how they are currently accommodated.

Drainage details will also need to be agreed.

Senior Land and Property Officer:

I understand that Crewkerne Town Council have submitted an application for new facilities at Henhayes. The District Council owns the access roadway and footpath and the Town Council would need to arrange access rights with SSDC if the traffic, foot or vehicle, needs to utilise SSDC's private land. Also there doesn't seem to be any allocation of parking for the users of these facilities.

Officer comment:

In response to the above comments, the Crewkerne Town Council clerk forwarded the following comments:

Just to clarify a point or two in your communication to Andrew. SSDC is responsible for the access roadway to the car parks and a couple of pavements. There is a deed of access for CTC onto Henhayes. The Town Council owns the access roadway into (the temporary car park) Henhayes and the pavement in front of the Aqua Centre and under the Lucombe Oak to the New Henhayes Centre.

The purpose of the building is to replace the existing buildings on Henhayes (changing rooms and Sports Club House to demolish them), which were in use when Crewkerne Urban District Council owned the car park pre 1974! Parking for this continued aspect should be broadly similar: Wednesday (?) and Friday evenings skittles in the club house and weekends the usual sports players football, cricket and rugby. Also it replaces the West One building thus transferring any users parking from West Street car park to South Street. The parking is minimal because during the day there are crèches and a playgroup, evenings - youth clubs.

Police Architectural Liaison Officer:

I still have major concerns regarding this project!

The closeness to the aqua centre is alarming as it will eat into the bank that is present around the Aqua Centre. It will create a very dark area with no surveillance and is in my opinion a crime generator. The grass banks shown by the southern elevation create an alley way which will add to this. Why are they necessary?

It may even allow easy access to the balcony. The recess to the front door is also a crime generator and should not be more than 300mm to dissuade groups of youths congregating. The gated access control to the balcony is easily climbable and should be more robust, perhaps a gated archway with no climbing aids. This area has suffered significant ASB and I believe that this building will add to these issues.

I would object to it in its current form.

Officer Comment:

The above comments were forwarded to the agent who then contacted Mr Nickerson to discuss his concerns. The agent then forwarded the following comments:

Following my recent conversation with Steve Nickerson, I would like to record the following points:

- Proximity - Mr Nickerson commented on the close proximity of the proposed community building to the Aqua Centre, and stated his concern that this would become an area which would attract anti-social behaviour (ASB). I referred Mr Nickerson to the previous application, which showed the two buildings side-by-side thus creating a 'dark alley'. By comparison, however, the current location of the proposed building creates a three metre wide vista between the two buildings allowing views to the southern areas of Henhayes.

- Recesses Entrance - Mr Nickerson felt the recessed entrance would also attract youth gatherings and ASB. I assured him that this had been overcome by the integration of a roller shutter which would be lowered at the end of business hours, thus securing the building and eliminating the recess.

- Access gate to spectators balcony - Mr Nickerson enquired why the balcony had to be accessed externally, and had concerns that the gate would be easily breached. I explained that the balcony would be accessed internally, but in the event of the fire external stair and gate would act as a means of escape. The gate would operate in one direction only, and would be activated by a push bar on the stair side. I would also like to take Mr Nickerson's advice and would look to specify either a tall gate or block off the area above the gate to dissuade people from climbing over.

Officer comment:

The Police Architectural officer forwarded the following comments:

I spoke with Tom yesterday and discussed the issues as outlined in his e-mail.

The issue of the entrance and fire exit are easily overcome as he has described, however I am still very concerned regarding the close proximity of the building with the Aqua Centre. This area has been blighted with ASB and criminal damage. The Aqua centre has been targeted with regular damage to its structure, recesses and windows which front the playing fields. The position of this new project will, I believe, assist miscreants to further target this area and remain unsurveilled. Perhaps my wording of creating an alley was inappropriate! I still believe that the closeness, together with the large tree canopy behind will create a very dark and uninviting area. I do not agree with the creation of a three metre vista when the new

building removes the last remaining vista of the Henhayes playing field from public view. I have constantly reminded the various interested parties that my agency will be the sole agency for dealing with the further issues of ASB and damage that this further development of Henhayes will undoubtedly create.

Somerset County Council Lead Officer for Integrated Youth Services:

Supports the application as it will 'result in tremendous benefits to local young people'.

REPRESENTATIONS

89 letters and emails have been received with regard to this application, of which 49 are in support and 40 raising objections. In addition, a group of 25 letters was received from both adult and child users of the West One Community Centre supporting the proposal.

In addition, a petition with over 2,000 names was submitted with the previous application raising concerns about the proposal.

Those in support have raised the following comments:

- Existing club facilities are not fit for purpose and need replacing.
- The development will make a positive difference to the people of Crewkerne.
- This project is long overdue.
- The provision of sports/youth facilities will help reduce anti-social behaviour.
- The lack of suitable facilities will mean sports people will play for teams outside of Crewkerne.
- More children/young adults brought into the town to play sports etc will have wider socio/economic benefits to Crewkerne.
- RFU and FA keen to support new facilities.
- Doing nothing is not an option - playing fields will not be viable without active clubs who in turn need modern facilities.
- Expect a growth in membership of clubs to rise by over 400 from 650 to approx 1,050.
- Will not be a small private members club but provide genuine community provision for all Crewkerne and beyond.
- No view existed of the playing fields from the town centre until the car park built in the 70's.
- Need facilities for younger people.

Those opposing the scheme have raised the following comments/issues:

- The existing sports club/changing facilities should be refurbished/rebuilt.
- The £800,000 cost is a waste of taxpayers money.
- Will only benefit a few people compared with number of taxpayers paying for it.
- Large sports centre at Wadham, plus existing facilities at Victoria Hall, the Aquacentre and the Henhayes centre.
- Henhayes is underused - this could be extended to provide the additional facilities.
- Should resist the loss and further erosion of green space and built intrusion into the recreation ground.
- Loss of green corridor and vista between the town and recreation field.
- View from Henhayes centre will be lost. Harmful impact on the users of the Henhayes Centre.
- Other options for its location should be explored.
- Modern design out of keeping.
- Scale of building is too large.
- Too close to Lucombe oak - will harm its continued survival.
- The recreation ground was left to the town for recreation not buildings.
- No parking.
- Application submitted to the County Council to make the recreation ground a Town Green.

- Will create a new building line that may set a precedent for future applications.
- Membership not open to all.
- Two thirds of revenue coming from bar receipts - harmful to viability of other businesses in the town.
- Do not need new licensed facilities.
- Removal of existing buildings will not result in an increase in green space - this will be taken up by new facilities.
- Building will be vandalised.
- No exit strategy from dependency on funding.
- Oak tree will be surrounded by buildings.
- Unique green area in the town centre must be preserved.
- Disruption to town centre during development.
- Building too close to sporting pitches.
- Alternative sites need to be examined.
- Increase in anti-social behaviour and noise/disturbance from social functions.

CONSIDERATIONS

The main issues with regard to this proposal are the need for the sports and community building, impact of the building in terms of its proposed siting, the scale of the building, highway/parking issues and impact on the Lucombe Oak.

The need for a new building has been outlined in the supporting documents. The key reason is that the current facilities, located at the southern edge of the recreation ground are in poor condition and expensive to refurbish. Moreover, the current changing room facilities need to be upgraded to meet the current criteria and requirements of the relevant sporting governing bodies. The work involved in bringing the current building up to standard includes improvements to the foul sewer, replacement of the entire plumbing, heating and electrical systems, new roof and insulation. Alterations and extension to building will be required to provide 4 changing rooms plus junior changing rooms and toilets. The estimated cost of all of these works to this building has been estimated at £220,000. This does not include other fees for example architects/planning fees nor improvement works to the sports club building. In addition, improvement works to the West One Community building have been estimated at £30,000. Moreover, there is no possibility of grants from outside bodies to assist with the refurbishment of the existing facilities.

Based on the above information, it is accepted that there is a need for new and improved facilities to serve the various sports and community clubs. Moreover, it is accepted that it will be costly to renovate, alter and extend the 3 existing buildings to bring them up to modern standards. The argument for one new building to replace the three existing buildings has been made on the basis of reducing operating costs, to provide one building that can provide the space and accessibility required by all of the various users, and to free up further green space to enable an extra junior pitch to be provided. In addition, the new building will act as a central hub for the various sports and others users, to promote participation in sport and the wider socio and economic benefit that taking part in sporting activity brings.

Pre application discussion with the Town Council and agent involved looking at the various options for the new facilities and how these can be best accommodated. The first option was to locate the new building on the site of the existing facilities. Due to the costs involved, as outlined above, and concerns from the Highway Authority about the increased use of the substandard narrow access from Henhayes Lane, a building on the current site has been discounted. The possibility of creating a grasscrete track to run from the access road serving the temporary car park, running parallel with and along the eastern elevation of the Aqua Centre, adjacent to the embankment, leading to the current site was explored. However, this was discounted at this grasscrete track would have been too close to the football pitch. It was considered that this would not be acceptable for safety reasons as well as the visual impact and harm to vehicles travelling within the recreation ground.

A further option was explored further to the north of the proposed location, in the north west corner of the recreation ground. However, this was discounted as it was considered too close

to residential properties and thus, there was concern at the genuine potential to harm residential amenity.

Thus, the choice was to locate the building adjacent to the Lucombe Oak, to the north east of the Aqua Centre. This site was preferred for its easy pedestrian access, good vehicular access via Bryants Row (a purpose built junction that serves the Waitrose car park, Aqua Centre, Henhayes Centre), availability of parking, close relationship to the town centre and the removal of the existing facilities that would free up space for junior pitches. Members should note that the first application proposed the siting of the building on the site of the Lucombe Oak. However, due to the level of public concern about the removal of the Lucombe Oak, notwithstanding concerns about its health, this application was withdrawn to enable the tree to remain and the proposed building placed to the east of the tree.

An assessment therefore has to be made as to merits of the proposed location of the building. There have been a number of objections to the proposed location of the building from local residents. It is important to note that whilst the building will be located within the recreation ground, it will not encroach onto the formal playing pitches. There are 3 main elements to consider in terms of the proposed location of the building. The first element is consideration of the loss of a part of the recreation ground area to the new building. The second is the visual impact caused by the building in terms of the erosion of the visual gap between the Henhayes Centre and Aqua Centre. The third issue is the impact of the location on the Lucombe Oak both in terms of physical impact and on its amenity value.

With regard to the loss of a part of the recreation ground to built form, it is considered that this proposal would represent a harmful intrusion into and erosion of part of the recreation ground. It is clear that the recreation ground is a highly popular and valuable asset for all of the various users/visitors and to Crewkerne as a whole. Therefore, it should be protected unless an overriding need is demonstrated for new development. The council's landscape architect and Conservation Manager have outlined in detail concerns about the siting of the building and its relationship with adjacent buildings. The building will extend approximately 21 metres beyond the building line of the Aqua Centre and 14 metres beyond the building line of the Henhayes Centre. Notwithstanding the physical loss of recreation ground, the building will be at variance with the established built form along the western edge of the recreation ground. In addition, the location of the building further erodes the amount of informal recreation space that is available for users of the recreation ground.

Comment has been made that there would not be a loss of green space within the recreation ground due to the removal of the existing buildings. Whilst it is intended for a junior pitch to be installed in place of the buildings, there will be a loss of informal recreation space. More importantly, it is the value of the loss of the informal recreation land adjacent to the Lucombe Oak and on land that forms an important open link between the town and the recreation ground that is of greater concern.

In addition, there is much concern at the loss of the visual gap and link between the town centre and the recreation ground. Comments have been received that this visual link has only existed since the 1970's. However, whilst noting this historical situation, for the last 30 plus years, there has been a visual gap between the town and the recreation ground. The length of the gap as it currently stands between the Aqua Centre and Henhayes Centre is 39.9 metres. This will be reduced to 14 metres if the new building is constructed.

Whilst this gap may have been eroded by the Henhayes Centre and the Aqua Centre, this visual gap is still significant and is considered an important characteristic of the town's Conservation Area. In addition, judging by the number of comments written about this issue, this visual gap is greatly valued by local residents and no doubt visitors to the town. Again, the landscape architect has outlined the concerns very succinctly about the value of this green gap between the existing built form and the recreation ground. The fact that the building has been moved further into the recreation ground to safeguard the tree means that the view through to and of the recreation ground from the town is reduced.

With regard to the impact on the Lucombe Oak, before expanding upon those issues, it is important to briefly outline the history of the surveys carried out in respect of the tree and its relationship to the proposed building. During the initial pre-application consultation, the Council's tree officer was asked to inspect the tree. This inspection revealed extensive fruiting bodies around the tree, a sign of ill health, and requested that a full assessment be undertaken by a qualified arborist. This was undertaken by Heartwood Arboricultural Consultants. They concluded that there is significant decay to the roots of the tree and is thus in a dangerous condition. Due to the location of the tree close to buildings and public areas, it was concluded that removal of the tree is the most appropriate response. This recommendation was accepted by the Town Council. However, due to the level of public concern about the loss of the tree, a further assessment and report was commissioned. This involved a static load test to ascertain its structural condition, particularly against the effects of wind. These tests and report concluded that the tree poses a 'very low risk of failure if exposed to the design wind load calculated'. However, the report did stress that the roots may decay further with clear implications for the structural health of the tree. On the basis of this report, the decision of the Town Council was to retain the tree and relocate the building.

In terms of the proposed location of the building, consideration has to be given as to whether the closeness of the building would physically harm the tree. An Arboricultural Method Statement was submitted with the application that referred to the findings of the load test report. This has outlined a Root Protection Area (RPA) within which no further development/encroachment should be allowed. This amounts to 707m² or a circle of 15 metre radius. There are existing incursions into the RPA, including the road to the north and underground services to the south. However, provided no further incursion is accepted into the RPA, the report states that development would therefore be acceptable. In addition, the report includes recommendations for tree protection during development. Relevant conditions will be attached to any consent to ensure the recommendations of the Arboricultural Method Statement are followed.

Whilst noting the above regarding the tree, it should be noted that the councils own arborist objects to the proposal on the basis that it seeks to 'unsustainably retain the tree as a key feature within a built environment, the lifespan of which is likely to far exceed the safe useful life expectancy of the tree'. This has been the consistent advice of the council's arborist since the receipt of the Heartwood report. In addition, a condition will be attached to require that other existing trees in the vicinity are not harmed during development.

The other important issue is whether the amenity value of the Lucombe Oak is significantly devalued by the addition of a further building constructed around it. Policy ST6 (criterion 8) of the SSLP seeks the retention and integration of attractive site features within a scheme. Whilst it is considered that the remaining open aspect around the tree will be further eroded by the new building, it is not considered that the impact on its overall amenity value will be harmed significantly to warrant refusal. It will be retained and integrated into the scheme and, importantly, can still be enjoyed by those in the locality.

The design philosophy of the development has been informed by seeking to reflect the existing buildings in the locality, in particular the Aqua Centre and the Henhayes Centre. It is of modern design using a mix of timber cladding and brick with profiled metal sheeting for the roof. The scale of the building has caused concern because of its sensitive location and the fact that its scale increases the level of erosion of the remaining open space between the existing buildings. Whilst it is accepted that the scale of the building is dictated by the requirement to accommodate all of the various users, it is considered that its scale, particularly given its siting will be harmfully dominant especially when viewed from the opposite side of the recreation ground. Concerns have been raised that the scale of the building will have a detrimental impact on users of the Henhayes Centre. Whilst it would clearly result in a building closer to the Henhayes Centre, the new building will be largely set forward of the Henhayes Centre and it is not considered that it would significantly harm the amenity of users of the centre to warrant refusal on those grounds.

In terms of highway issues, the Highway Authority have not objected to the development. An amended plan was submitted to achieve a revised turning area. The details of this was

outlined above. The last 2 metres of the turning head will encroach onto a small section of the 5 metre run off area for the rugby pitch. In checking Sport England advice on rugby run off areas, it states that the RFU do not specify a minimum safe over-run but do recommend a 5m clear margin around the pitch where possible. This only represents a small encroachment into the run off area, and still allows 3 metres from the edge of the pitch. It should be noted that this encroachment should be compared with the much more significant encroachment of the temporary car park surfacing into the run off area.

The Police Architectural Liaison officer has raised an objection due to the closeness of the proposed building and the Aqua Centre. He is concerned about vandalism and the creation of a dark enclosed area between the two buildings that will encourage additional criminal activity. Policy ST9 of the SSLP seeks the need for security and crime prevention to be taken into account. As can be viewed from the comments above, the agent responded to those concerns but the Police Architectural Liaison Officer has maintained an objection to the proposal.

Several comments have been received about the cost of the building and the long term management/funding of the building. The Economic Development Team Leader has sought a revised business plan and an oral update will be given with regard to any additional information received. Most of these issues raised are not planning considerations. It is clearly important to ensure that there is a sound financial plan for the building. However, the Economic Development Team leader has advised that there are no issues that prevent the planning merits of the proposal being considered.

Conclusion:

The principle of providing new sporting and community facilities is supported. However, there are significant concerns in terms of the siting of the building, the erosion of green space within the recreation ground and the harm to/significant erosion of the visual link between the town and recreation ground. For those reasons, it is considered that these concerns outweigh the benefits of the scheme. It is therefore recommended for refusal.

SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATION/UNILATERAL UNDERTAKING

Not applicable to this application.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse permission.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. The proposed development by reason of its siting, scale and layout will result in the loss of an important visual gap between the town and the Henhayes Recreation Ground and would create a further harmful intrusion into and erosion of part of the recreation ground. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan.
2. The layout proposes the siting of the new building within close proximity to the existing Aqua Centre, creating an unsurveilled and dark area to the west of the new building. This has the unacceptable potential to be a crime generator, which will lead to increased social tension, criminal damage and anti-social behaviour. The proposal does not therefore promote a safe environment and is contrary to Policy ST9 of the South Somerset Local Plan, advice contained in PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development) and the ODPM document 'Safer Places - The Planning System and Crime Prevention' (2004).