

Area West Committee – 19th September 2012

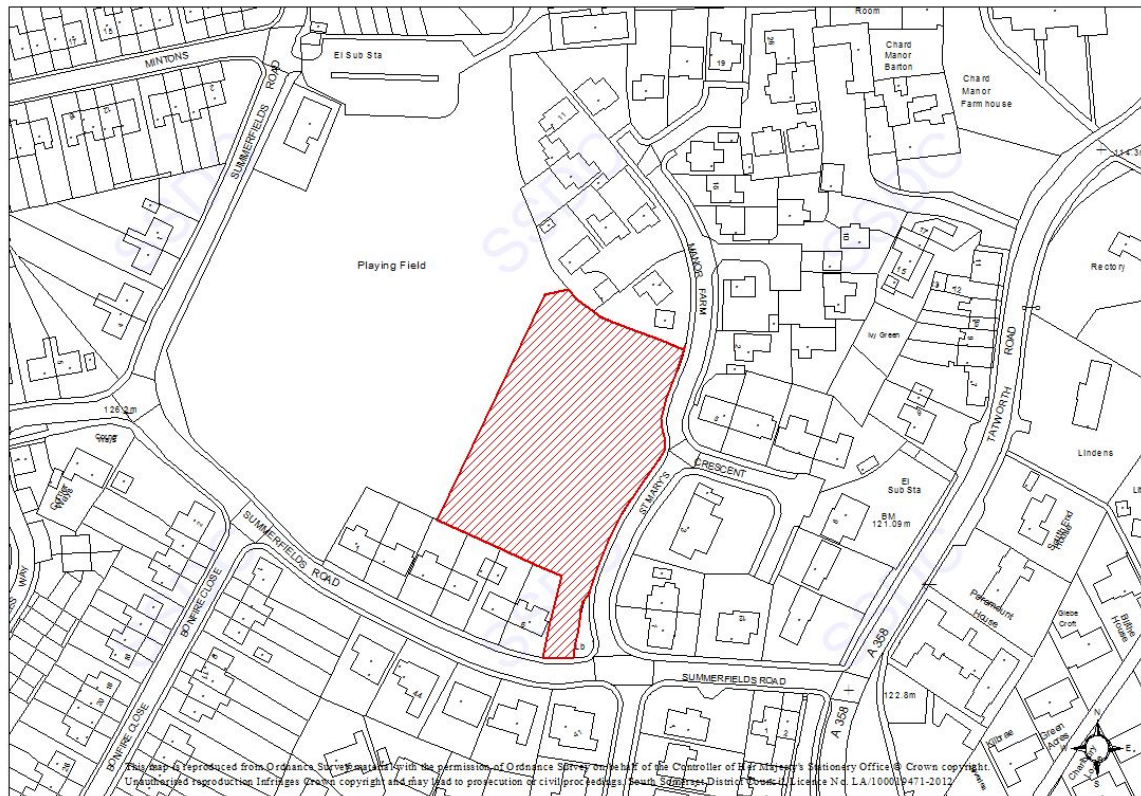
Officer Report On Planning Application: 12/02448/FUL

Proposal:	Erection of a new single storey medical centre with associated external works and car parking (revised application) (GR 332144/108083)
Site Address:	Land Part Of Playing Field St Marys Crescent Chard
Parish:	Chard
HOLYROOD (CHARD) Ward (SSDC Member)	Ms B Halse (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	Andrew Gunn Tel: (01935) 462192 Email: andrew.gunn@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date:	22nd August 2012
Applicant:	Haven Health Properties Ltd
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Mr Simon Bird BRP Architects 1 Millers Yard, Roman Way Market Harborough Leicestershire LE16 7PW
Application Type:	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASON(S) FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application is brought to committee with the agreement of the Ward Member and Chair to allow members to discuss the key issues i.e. the loss of school playing field and highway safety issues.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



The site is located on the eastern side of an existing school playing field at Manor Court School, Chard, to the south west side of Chard. The school buildings and playing field are located within a residential area, comprising a mix of bungalows, 2 storey semi-detached and terraced houses. St Mary's Crescent and Manor Farm run parallel to the playing field to the east of the application site. The boundaries of the site are currently defined by a mix of hedgerow, trees and post and wire fencing.

The application seeks consent to construct a new medical centre, along with parking and a new vehicular and pedestrian access. The medical centre will provide a new home for the existing Chard GP surgery of Dr Down & Partners located at The Tawstock Medical Centre, High Street, Chard. The Design and Access statement submitted with the application outlines that the 'existing building is beyond economic and practical conversion to provide compliant modern healthcare facilities for the GP's to provide the necessary level of patient care and its remodelling / reconfiguration is not deemed feasible'.

The new building will be located in the north-west section of the application site with the parking area in the southern section. Vehicular access will be gained via a new access off St Mary's Crescent to the east. A section of the existing eastern boundary hedgerow will be removed to create the new access. 35 parking spaces will be created along with 4 disabled spaces, 2 short stay spaces and drop/off/ambulance space. Provision will also be made for bicycle and motorcycle parking. The existing fence along the top part of the northern boundary will be replaced with a new timber fence. A 1.8 metre weld mesh fence will be erected along the new western boundary.

The medical centre will be a single storey building. The walls will be constructed with a mix of hamstone, render, timber boarding and blue washed brick. The entrance lobby will be constructed from steel and glass with an aluminium roof.

The supporting documents state that the main part of the playing field is laid out as a running track with the remainder as open space that is not used for any particular purpose. The area chosen for the medical centre is on unused sloping uneven ground.

The application was amended to omit a small section of land in the far southern corner at the junction of St Mary's Crescent and Summerfields Road. This piece of land is highway land rather than land owned by the applicant.

The application was also supported with a Transport Assessment, Ecological Assessment, Design and Access Statement and a Planning Summary Document.

HISTORY

12/00169/FUL – Erection of a new single storey medical centre with associated external works and car parking (withdrawn May 2012).

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

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (adopted April 2000)

STR2 – Towns

Policy 49 – Transport Requirements of New Development

South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006)

ST5 – General Principles of Development

ST6 – Quality of Development

EH10 – No Development Areas

CR1 - Existing Playing Fields/Recreation Areas

Policy-related Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework:

Chapter 7 – Requiring good design

Chapter 8 – Promoting healthy communities

CONSULTATIONS

Town Council:

Refusal on the following grounds;

- Access and egress at St Mary's Crescent is not acceptable
- Junction inadequate for increased volume of traffic onto main A358
- Loss of School Playing Fields

Town Council (Amended Plans):

I've spoken to the Chair of Planning and under Delegated Authority I can advise you that the Town Council's previous recommendation to refuse this application stands. The grounds for refusal also are the same as before, being on the grounds that access and egress at St. Mary's Crescent is not acceptable, Junction inadequate for increased volume of traffic onto main A358, Loss of school playing fields. I would be grateful if these comments can be passed on to the Area West Committee.

Local Highway Authority

I refer to the above mentioned planning application received on 2nd July 2012 and following a site visit on the same day I have the following observations on the highway and transportation aspects of this proposal.

The proposal relates to the erection of a new medical centre with associated car parking.

Transport Assessment and Travel Plan

Part of the application saw the submission of a Transport Assessment (TA), this has been submitted for audit and the Highway Authority's observations are set out below.

Regarding trip generation rates for the future surgery have been based on patient surveys carried out over four days at the existing surgery. The surveys broadly indicate a similar trend in patient numbers. It was previously noted that the daily trip rates were lower than would be derived from TRICS. It is noted that the current surgery operates consulting hours of 0900 to 1230 and 1500 to 1800, Monday and Friday. This would therefore explain the discrepancy, and may also explain the uneven spread of patients throughout the day along with the differing number of GPs and staff. Based on the figures provided for the AM peak there would be 12 arrivals and 1 departure whilst the PM peak would be 4 arrivals and 9 departures. From reviewing the TRICS data these trip rates are considered reasonable. However not all staff trips for the proposed surgery

have been accounted for. Trips by the four district nurses staff do not seem to have been included. This would likely amount to a maximum of four two-way trips per day. It was also estimated that 1 delivery per day takes place for the present surgery.

Assessing the proposals traffic impact it was found that the applicant has undertaken a number of traffic counts in addition to those featured in the previous TA for the original planning application. In regards to this the Furnham Road/East Street/Fore Street signalised junction it was found that the applicant's modelling software was not compatible with MOVA controlled signals. Therefore the Highway Authority feels that further analysis of the junction should be carried out using a different method. However, given the very low levels of development traffic generated through here, I am willing to accept that the effect on this junction would be small.

Analysis has been carried out for 2012 and 2017 using suitable modelling methods. From the details provided it appears that the growth factors shown are considered to be satisfactory. Overall, the analysis shows that at peak time the development's effect on the local road network would be small. Having looked at the likely levels of traffic generated by the surgery and the levels of base traffic flows recorded it appears that these conclusions are acceptable.

In terms of the application sites accessibility it is noted that public transport (buses) passes within approximately 210m of the site. Whilst the site is accessible by foot, the location of the new surgery is likely to reduce the number of people who decide to walk from the north of Chard.

Finally in terms of parking, it is apparent that the number of car parking spaces proposed for the site exceeds those laid out in the current Somerset Parking Strategy e.g. 1 space per 25sqm of the ground floor area. With internal floor space at around 700sqm, this is likely to equate to around 28 spaces, which is less than the 35 spaces proposed. Paragraph 12.12.11 states that the average length of stay is approximately 26 minutes; the TA has calculated its parking provision assuming an average stay of 40 minutes. This 40 minutes is the 'worse case' patient stay but cannot be used to calculate the number of spaces.

If the TA's rationale is believed to be correct i.e. 26 patient stay, then 11 patient spaces would be required with an additional 13 spaces for staff giving a total of 24 spaces. This demonstrates that the Parking Strategy's figure of 28 is reasonable.

In terms of the staff parking, justification for extra parking spaces can not be based on how present and future employees may wish to travel. It is noted that there has been a deduction of 3 spaces when compared to the previous application.

The TA has indicated that the proposal will make provision for eight cycles, four motorcycles and four disabled parking bays. All three elements are considered to be acceptable by the Highway Authority.

In regards to the Travel Plan this is still being considered and their observations have not been completed in time for me to include them within this response. Once these have been completed I will submit them to the Local Planning Authority.

Means of Access

The proposed access will be located on St Marys Crescent, which is a residential cul-de-sac where currently traffic speed and volume is limited. From the details shown on Drawing 06 Rev J it is apparent that the boundary hedge has been set back to provide

visibility to the junction with Summerfields Road. However I do have concerns over the use of St Marys Crescent as the carriageway is quite narrow and it was observed during my site visit that there were some vehicles parked on the carriageway. Consequently I have concerns that the proposed development could lead to an interruption in the free flow of traffic, which could lead to stacking back to the junction with Summerfields Road.

Surrounding Highway Network

During the consultation for the previous planning application the Highway Authority raised concerns over the standard of the junction with Summerfields Road. The Highway Authority stated that although suitable visibility can be achieved to the east, the visibility achieved to the west is curtailed by the presence of the existing boundary hedge with the adjacent field that fronts onto the highway at this point. The applicant has looked to address this issue by submitting a revised site plan (Drawing 06 Rev J) which has seen the height of the hedge reduced to incorporate the required visibility standards.

The Highway Authority also had concerns over the constrained nature of the junction and that it would likely lead to staking on Summerfield Road. However from the details provided in the Transport Assessment it is apparent the impact of the proposed vehicle movements is not considered to be significant enough to have a detrimental impact on the junction.

Conclusion

To conclude I am satisfied that based on the level of vehicle movements set out in the Transport Assessment this proposal is unlikely to have a significant impact on the surrounding highway network. However the applicant would be required to amend the parking layout to accord with the Parking Strategy. I therefore raise no objection to this proposal and if planning permission were to be granted I would require the following conditions to be attached.

- Before the proposal hereby permitted is occupied a properly consolidated and surfaced access shall be constructed (not loose stone or gravel) details of which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- Provision shall be made within the site for the disposal of surface water so as to prevent its discharge onto the highway, details of which shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- Plans showing a parking area providing for 28 vehicles shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority before the development is commenced. This area shall be properly consolidated before the use commences and shall not be used other than for the parking of vehicles in connection with the development hereby permitted.
- At the proposed accesses there shall be no obstruction to visibility greater than 900mm above the adjoining road level within the visibility splay shown on Drawing 06 Rev J. Such visibility splays shall be constructed prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted and shall thereafter be maintained at all times.

Sport England:

It is understood that the development is likely to prejudice the use, or lead to the loss of use, of land being used as a playing field; or is on land that forms part of, or constitutes a

playing field, as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (SI 2010/2184) Schedule 5. Sport England responds to this application as a statutory consultee.

Sport England has therefore considered the application in the light of its playing fields policy. Sport England's policy; 'a Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England' is available from our website: [www.sportengland.org/ Facilities & Planning> Our Policy on Playing Fields](http://www.sportengland.org/Facilities%20&%20Planning/Our%20Policy%20on%20Playing%20Fields)).

The aim of this policy is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of quality pitches to satisfy the current and estimated future demand for pitch sports within the area. The policy seeks to protect all parts of the playing field from development and not just those which, for the time being, are laid out as pitches. The Policy states that;

Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of, all or any part of a playing field, or land last used as a playing field or allocated for use as a playing field in an adopted or draft deposit local plan, unless, in the judgement of Sport England, one of the Specific circumstances applies."

Reason; Development which would lead to the loss of all or part of a playing field, or which would prejudice its use, should not normally be permitted because it would permanently reduce the opportunities for participation in sporting activities. Government planning policy and the policies of Sport England have recognised the importance of such activities to the social and economic well-being of the country.

Playing fields continue to be given greater protection and recognition by the Government through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DCLG, March 2012). Paragraph 74 states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

It is proposed to build on a significant part of the school playing field to provide a new medical centre and car parking. The school playing field serves the pupils of Manor Court School. From Google Earth images, the playing field is marked out for cricket and athletics. It would appear that the site is large enough for football or rugby during the winter months. The proposal, if given approval and implemented, will leave a significantly smaller school playing field.

The applicant asked me to visit the site this week to confirm whether the site does or does not meet exception E3 of the playing fields policy as stated above:

The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch, and does not result in the loss of or inability to make use of any playing pitch (including the maintenance and adequate safety margins), a reduction in the size of the playing area of any playing pitch or the loss of any other sporting/ancillary facilities on site.

I can confirm that the playing field is CAPABLE of forming or part forming a playing pitch and should be retained as its current use.

The strategic planning evidence for playing pitches is contained within South Somerset Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS). For cricket and football in Chard, the PPS identifies a deficit of playing pitches now and in the future. On the Council's own strategy advice, we would encourage the local planning authority to plan and develop more playing pitch sites in Chard and not lose the existing ones to development. Once lost, they are lost forever.

The proposed financial sum (£50,000) for improved changing at Jocelyn Park is 2/3 of a mile from the school and when accessed from the school by foot can only be reached by crossing a number of roads. The park is a recreation ground containing two football pitches and a MUGA. We question the financial amount proposed as it is not adequate to provide for new provision and it obviously does not include the cost of purchasing land. Whilst improving the changing at the park is good for sport, ~ is not a replacement of playing field land lost.

Through this planning application process we have consulted the national governing bodies for sport (NGB) for football and cricket:

1. English Cricket Board (ECB)

The school is part of the Chard CC 'Chance to Shine' project and receives coaching at the school. The school takes part in club competitions and they host a small inter school cricket tournament. The ECB supports Sport England's objection to the proposal (set out below) and would like to see the current school facility upgraded to make it fit for purpose.

2. Football Association (FA)

The site is not currently used by any clubs/teams as the School does not allow community access. The site appears big enough to accommodate a youth size pitch. It is not clear whether the proposed solution of a financial contribution towards changing at Jocelyn Park is sufficient funding. If the proposal was given planning permission, The FA would want the following considered:

- The School site is opened up to allow community access e.g. a 9v9 pitch for youth football
- Further details required on whether the funding for Jocelyn Park is adequate to address the changing room issue there.

In light of the above, Sport England objects to the proposal because is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions in Sport England 's playing fields policy and Government Policy as set out in the NPPF.

If your Authority is minded to approve this application, it should be referred to the National Planning Casework Un~ in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009, and the DCLG letter of 10 March 2011. For the avoidance of doubt, and in accordance with Circular 02109. Sport England is objecting on the following grounds:

- 1 that there is a deficiency in the provision of playing fields in the area of the local authority concerned;
- 2 that the proposed development would result in a deficiency in the provision of playing fields in the area of the local authority concerned;

- 3 that where the proposed development involves a loss of a playing field and an alternative or replacement playing field is proposed to be provided, that alternative or replacement does not match (whether in quantity, quality or accessibility) that which would be lost.

Somerset Playing Fields Association (SPFA):

We note the latest re-submission of the proposal to construct new GP premises on a part of the playing field belonging to Manor Court School, Chard. Whilst it is noteworthy that the latest incarnation of the plans call for a slight reduction in the amount of land required for the proposed development (the previous plans encroaching onto the formally laid out running track cum playing pitch) we still have concerns as regards the loss of land designated for physical education, however, it would appear from the nature and tone of the submission documents that a basis for agreement exists between the principal parties involved – i.e. Manor Court School, Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, and Sport England.

It is not for the Association to challenge the School or SCC on what they deem to be “surplus to requirements”, but we do seriously question the reference to the subject plot of land as being “unusable” and the statement “The loss of the unused area of playing field is unavoidable”. The area of land may well be uneven and have a small gradient, but these features do not make for unsuitability as regards physical education use, or other outdoor pursuits for that matter. It may have escaped the attention of the School’s current authorities and the incumbent SCC, but the whole site (including those parts around the perimeter already built upon) was acquired for and, in the past, utilised extensively by the School for the delivery of physical education. The current state of the so called “redundant” area of the site is, we would suggest, directly attributable to a policy of non-use and neglect of maintenance for said original purpose.

If the proposed development for new GP premises is to proceed we would urge great attention to the provision of a proper buffer zone between the built area and the remaining sports part of the site. The landscaping shown to that boundary, in our opinion, does not provide either a sufficiency or a suitable buffer strip. All too often development is pushed extremely close to an existing playing field without proper thought being given to the need for buffering between the two which, more often than not, subsequently results in friction between the respective occupants of the built environment and the operators and users of the playing field. In consequence usability of the playing field becomes compromised, leading to a diminished facility (reduction of sports pitches, etc.), and further potential for loss of amenity land.

Leisure Policy Co-Ordinator:

This response updates our responses to the previous application on this site (12/00169/FUL) which was withdrawn. As you are aware, there were several pre-application meetings regarding this scheme and the potential loss of playing fields, and further meetings during the course of the previous application.

The applicant has provided detailed information regarding this in their Design and Access Statement, and Updated Planning Statement which summarises the position and proposals to mitigate against this loss of playing fields. I would however like to point out however that both the Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement are ambiguous in their references to the District and County Councils. It is not made clear that it is the County Council that will be in receipt of the funding from the sale of the land and the District Council, which would be in receipt of the planning contribution, if approved.

The policy areas and factors that govern this loss of playing fields are as follows:

1. Saved SSDC Local Plan Policy CR1

Saved Policy CR1 from the Council’s Local Plan states the following:

Existing outdoor playing space, recreation fields and recreation areas are an important community resource which the Local Plan seeks to safeguard:

Policy CR1

Development which would result in the loss of playing fields will only be permitted where:

1. Sports and recreation facilities can best be retained and enhanced through the redevelopment of a small part of the site;
2. Alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available;
3. There is an excess of sports provision and public open space in the area, taking account of the recreation and amenity value of such provision.

2. National Planning Policy Framework

The Council’s Saved Local Plan Policy CR1, was based on Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) now replaces PPG17, but the need for local authorities to produce assessments of needs, and identify quantitative and qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space and sports and recreational facilities is retained. (Paragraph 73). Paragraph 74 of the NPPF also states that:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

3. Population Growth in Chard

As the second largest town in the district, the draft Local Plan is proposing major population growth for Chard, with an increase of 1,861 dwellings during the course of the Local Plan and a further 1,376 after 2028.

4. Playing Pitch Strategy and Local Needs Assessment

The main issue from Community, Health and Leisure is the major deficiency of playing pitch provision in the Chard area. In 2002, the Council produced a Playing Pitch Strategy, which identified a major shortfall of playing pitches in the Chard area. In 2009, the Council updated the local needs assessment for pitches using the Sport England playing pitch methodology, and identified a major shortfall of all types of pitches in Chard, with the exception of adult rugby, as follows:

Year		Adult football	Junior football	Mini soccer	Cricket	Adult rugby	Junior rugby	Total
2009	No of pitches	-1.4	-2	-1.2	-3.9	2.5	-3	-9
	Sq m of shortfall	12,040	10,000	2,640	58,500		24,000	107,180
2029	No of pitches	-2.1	-2.3	-1.4	-4.5	2.3	-3.5	-11.5
	Sq m of shortfall	18,060	11,500	3,080	67,500		28,000	128,140

In accordance with the test 3 of the Saved Local Plan Policy CR1, and the requirements of the NPPF, the Council can clearly identify that there is no excess of playing pitches within the Chard area, and with the major population growth that is expected for Chard, this shortfall will continue to grow.

5. Local Playing Pitch Projects

Local Plan and Chard Regeneration Strategy

The previous Local Plan identified a site in Chard for new playing pitches as does the draft Local Plan (previously known as the Core Strategy), to serve new developments to the south east of the town. There are also proposals within the Chard Regeneration Strategy, involving the relocation of Chard Town FC. Both of these are long term aspirations for the town.

Jocelyn Park

There is a desire within the town to develop new changing facilities at the existing senior football pitches at Jocelyn Park. There is no changing provision at the Park and this is having an impact on the usage of the pitches, and the membership of the 4 local teams who currently use these pitches. Teams playing at these pitches are using changing rooms at other venues within the town, and having to walk through the town to play football. By developing new changing rooms and enhancing the site, this will secure the future of these pitches for football in Chard.

Somerset FA

The Somerset FA are keen to see more junior pitch development in Chard, particularly to accommodate the new 9 x 9 games, for which school sites would be ideal.

Somerset Cricket Board / Chard Cricket Club

There are good existing links between Chard Cricket Club and the school, and the provision of an artificial wicket at the school could develop more community opportunities for cricket on the school site.

Manor Court School

Consultation with the Headteacher at Manor Court School indicates that the school are willing to open up their facilities for community use, if funding was available. For example, through the provision of a new community junior football pitch on the remaining part of their school playing field, which would support the identified need for more junior pitch provision in Chard.

The Headteacher also requested that similar weld mesh fencing to that already surrounding the school site be provided along the boundary between the new medical centre and the school, and the provision of a lockable gate within this boundary fencing.

6. Conclusion

It is clear that the applicant has acknowledged the issues surrounding the potential loss of playing pitches and the need for additional pitches in Chard and is aware that failure to respond to these issues would result in the application being refused.

The applicant, in conjunction with officers from the Council, has explored an off site financial contribution in accord with Saved Policy CR1.2, as the most pragmatic solution. This would also comply with NPPF paragraph 74, bullet point 2. As referred to in the Updated Planning Statement, based on a loss of playing fields equating to a maximum of 3,555 sqm, and using the Council's cost of £16.36 per sqm, this would result in a maximum contribution of £58,160. Following discussions between officers and the applicant, a figure of £50,000 was agreed in principle in November, 2011, and this is the contribution proposed in the Design and Access and Planning Statements.

In summary, although the applicant is not replacing the loss of the playing field area with an equivalent area, there is significant community benefit to be gained from a financial contribution to mitigate against this loss:

- There are several potential playing pitch projects which would benefit from funding in order to increase the quantity and quality of provision of pitch sports in Chard and increase participation in these sports.
- It is not intended that any contribution would fund all of these projects in their entirety. For example, any sum secured towards new changing rooms at Jocelyn Park would be used to help secure grants from other funders.
- A financial contribution towards the new changing rooms at Jocelyn Park would help to retain, and increase, football use at these pitches
- A financial contribution towards opening up the Manor Court School site for community use would meet the requirements of the Football Association and English Cricket Board (as outlined in Sport England's response)
- The provision of a new medical centre will provide health benefits to residents of Chard.
- The proposals meet the requirements of Saved Local Plan policy CR1.2 and the NPPF

It is therefore recommended that:

1. The application is approved in accordance with Saved Local Plan Policy CR1.2 and the NPPF, on the basis that a contribution of £50,000 is made towards:
Enhancing facilities at Jocelyn Park, and/or towards the development or enhancement of other new or existing community sports pitches in Chard
2. This contribution is subject to a Unilateral Agreement or Section 106 agreement.
3. The contribution is released on grant of planning permission
4. The contribution will be repayable by the Council if not used within 10 years of receipt.
5. Weld mesh fencing, similar to that already provided around the Manor Court Playing Fields, with a lockable gate, is provided between the new boundary between the playing fields and medical centre.

Landscape Officer:

I note the revised application seeking to construct a new medical centre with associated external works at the above site. From a landscape perspective, there is little change to the earlier application, to which I perceived there to be no substantial landscape issues, other than;

- (i) The need for the best trees to be retained, along with a tree protection plan to ensure their integrity during construction - I suspect Phil will advise on the detail of that, and;
- (ii) The need for a landscape proposal, to assist integration of the site into its surround.

If minded to approve, please condition the above.

Conservation Manager:

There are two aspects of the design that I feel should be reconsidered:-

1. The prominence of the collection of solar panels and roof lights on the top roof. The sight lines onto these are not analysed but, while these features may not be visible from close-to, I am concerned about their appearance from further away. I would prefer to see the solar panel array screened. And I wonder if clerestorey lighting rather than roof domes would be better?

2. On the massing, the proportion of the higher section to the lower - the higher looks too high and if reduced slightly would look better and emphasise horizontality.

Landscape scheme required as Robert has no doubt said with careful consideration of the playing field boundary.

Engineer:

The views of Wessex Water should be sought regarding adequacy of public sewers (foul and surface water).

Use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems techniques to reduce surface water run off. Drainage details to be submitted for approval.

County Archaeology:

No objection to the application.

REPRESENTATIONS

(Original application) 3 letters/emails have been received in relation to the proposed development raising the following concerns:

- Highway safety – junction of Summerfields Road and St Mary's Crescent provides poor visibility/ on a blind bend
- Poor quality access
- Playing fields should be retained to promote physical activity and reduce levels of obesity.
- Not a suitable location for a medical centre
- Is there sufficient parking? Many cars currently park in St Mary's Crescent and this will add to the number

1 of the above neighbours supported the provision of new medical facilities but raised highway and parking concerns outlined above.

1 letter was received in relation to the amended plan that omitted the small section of land within Highway land at the junction of Summerfields and St Mary's Crescent. The writer repeated the above highway safety concerns and that the land should be retained as playing field.

CONSIDERATIONS

The main planning issues with regard to this application are the need for the development, the loss of part of a school playing field, highway and parking issues, and design and layout.

Need for the development

In terms of the need for the development, the agent has outlined that that development will provide a new facility for the existing Chard GP surgery of Dr Down & Partners located at The Tawstock Medical Centre, currently located on the High Street in Chard. The Design and Access statement submitted with the application outlines that the 'existing building is beyond economic and practical conversion to provide compliant modern healthcare facilities for the GP's to provide the necessary level of patient care and its remodelling / reconfiguration is not deemed feasible'.

Given the increasing demand on health facilities, the need to provide enhanced facilities and the increase in population placing additional strain on existing facilities, the need for the new medical centre is accepted by the Local Planning Authority. In terms of identifying suitable sites, the agent has stated that a search was undertaken for suitable

and affordable sites/premises but that none were found that met their needs or budget. Thus, this site was identified with the agent stating that after an open consultation process, this plot was concluded to be surplus to Somerset County Council requirements.

Loss of playing field

The key consideration that follows is whether the loss of a section of the existing school playing field is acceptable. The proposed development will remove around 1/3 of the total school playing field. The Design and Access Statement and the Planning Statement outlines that this part of the playing field is unusable being located on ground that is sloping and uneven. Moreover, it is currently unused. However, as can be noted by the comments of Sport England and the Somerset Playing Fields Association, the assertion that this part of the playing field is unusable is strongly contested. Following a site visit by Mr Parsons from Sport England, he concluded that the land was 'capable of forming, or part forming a playing pitch and should be retained as its current use'. Moreover, the SPFA have seriously questioned the applicant's conclusion regarding the usability of this part of the playing field.

The above concerns have to be balanced against the benefits that the proposed development will bring. In particular, the enhancement of sport/play facilities at Manor Court School and new changing facilities at Jocelyn Park, assisted by a contribution of £50,000 from the applicant to mitigate for the loss of part of the playing field. Moreover, the proposal has received the support of the Council's Leisure Policy Officer, concluding that 'there is significant community benefit to be gained from a financial contribution to mitigate against this loss'. In addition to the financial contribution that will enhance and provide new sport provision, both the Leisure Policy Officer and applicant have outlined the health benefits to be obtained by the provision of a new medical centre. This is strengthened by the lack of any new medical facilities being provided in Chard in the short term.

Thus, there are widely differing views and recommendations from various Sport and Leisure consultees on this proposal. Whilst the benefits of the scheme are fully acknowledged, Sport England have raised an objection to the loss of part of the playing field along with strong concerns raised from the SPFA. In particular, Sport England do not consider that the contribution of £50,000 is adequate to provide for new provision and does not include the cost of purchasing land. Importantly, the contribution does not overcome the fact that playing field will be lost, and once lost, it is lost forever. On the basis of the Sport England objection, the application is recommended for refusal. If members are minded to approve the application, it will have to be referred to the National Planning Casework Unit. This is a body established by the government previously undertaken by the Regional Government Offices to assess certain types of development including development that would result in the loss of playing fields.

Highway and parking

Concern has been raised by the Town Council and local residents about the standard of the local highway network, in particular the visibility at the junction of Summerfields Road and St Mary's Crescent. The earlier application was withdrawn, amongst other reasons, to undertake an additional transport assessment of the proposal. The Highway Authority has assessed the applicant's Transport Assessment and conclude that the level of traffic movements is unlikely to have a significant impact on the surrounding highway network and junctions, including the junction of Summerfields and St Mary's Crescent, and the Convent Junction in the centre of Chard.

The Highway Authority still retain concerns regarding the use of St Marys Crescent due to the narrowness of the carriageway and parking of vehicles on this road. Thus, the

proposed development could lead to an interruption on the free flow of traffic which could lead to stacking back to the junction with Summerfields Road. However, given that the impact of the vehicle movement is not considered to be significant, the Highway Authority conclude that there would not be a detrimental impact on the junction.

With regard to the visibility at the junction of Summerfields Road and St Mary's Crescent, the previous concern about the sub standard level of visibility looking to the west, has been overcome by reducing the height of the hedge to incorporate the required visibility splays. Any approval would need to be conditioned to ensure that this hedge is retained at the acceptable height to retain the required visibility at the junction.

In terms of parking, the scheme will provide 35 spaces along with bicycle and motorbike parking. The Highway Authority have stated that the number of spaces exceeds those laid out in the Somerset Parking Strategy which would equate to around 28 spaces. They have requested that an amended plan is submitted to show a reduced parking provision. However, given the proposed number of spaces is not significantly over the parking strategy requirement, the proposed number of parking spaces is considered to be acceptable.

Design and layout

A modern design approach has been applied to the new medical centre using a pallet of different materials. This is considered to be acceptable given the range of different housing types and materials in the surrounding area. The Conservation Manager has raised issues in relation to elements of the design and the agent has been asked to look into the points raised. No response has been received to date from the agent but it is not considered that the design issues raised are significant to warrant refusal. No objection is raised to the layout of the proposed scheme.

Residential amenity

In terms of relationship with adjacent residential properties, this proposal is considered to be acceptable. The medical centre building will be located close to the northern boundary with residential properties located on the other side of the hedgerow. However, as the medical centre is single storey and given the existing boundary treatment, it is not considered that the development will result in any harmful overlooking or impact to the nearest residential properties.

No development area

The whole of the school playing field is located within a designated No Development Area as defined in the South Somerset Local Plan. The policy states that 'Development which would have an adverse impact on the amenity or recreational value of open land will not be permitted unless a special community, educational or recreational need is identified'. If members conclude that the benefits of the proposed development outweigh the objections raised, the proposal would be considered to meet a community need and thus no objection is raised to the development in relation to this policy.

Other issue

The School has requested that provision is made for a lockable gate within the new boundary fencing between the playing field and the medical centre. A condition can be attached to any approval to agree boundary treatments – this provision can be sought as part of this condition.

SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATION/UNILATERAL UNDERTAKING

A Unilateral Undertaking was submitted by the applicant to the District Council on the 28th August 2012 to provide a sum of £50,000 to mitigate for the loss of part of the

Manor Court School playing field. The Unilateral Undertaking has been sent to Legal Services to confirm that it is acceptable.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse permission.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The proposed medical centre will be constructed on part of a school playing field in a local authority area where there is a deficiency in the provision of playing fields and the proposed development would result in a deficiency in the provision of playing fields. Furthermore, the mitigation being provided would not provide an acceptable alternative or replacement in respect of the playing field that would be lost. The development is therefore contrary to Paragraph 74 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy CR1 of the South Somerset Local Plan.
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