

EXTERNAL WORKS AND IMPROVED SPORTS FACILITIES

AT

**MILLWORTH RECREATION GROUND,
MILLWORTH LANE, SHINFIELD, READING RG2 9EN**

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Date: 24th June 2024
Ref: TCG 6890 – *Design & Access Statement*

INTRODUCTION

This statement accompanies a planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent to undertake external works and improvements to the sports facilities at the Millworth Lane recreation ground. It will describe the existing facilities at the site, the proposed improvements that the scheme intends to provide, and a commentary on how these meet planning policy requirements.

THE EXISTING SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Access to the recreation ground is via Millworth Lane, a residential cul-de-sac serving approximately 15 dwellings. This reverts to an unmade shared surface approach into the recreation ground, with a shared access is into the northern corner into a gravel surfaced car park. The recreation ground benefits from a modest pavilion, some small outbuildings for sports equipment storage, cricket practice nets, and children's play equipment. The remainder, as expected for a site of this nature, is primarily open space laid to grass. This provides for cricket in the summer via the provision of both grass and artificial wickets, and football for the remainder of the year. The site also has 4 tennis courts utilised by Shinfield Tennis Club, which has an associated car park provision.

The site sits within a semi-rural setting. The surroundings consist of the access road to the north east beyond which is Shinfield St Mary's CE Junior School. To the south-east is open space associated with the Langley Mead SANG, to the south west is farmland, and to the north west is allotments.

PLANNING HISTORY

Not particularly relevant to the proposals, but a recent planning application has gained consent to install WC facilities within the curtilage of the tennis club. Thereafter, there's no planning history relevant to the proposals.

PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Government guidance is contained within the NPPF, within which Para 102 is relevant;

'Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate'

Wokingham Borough Development Plan

Policy TB08 confirms the provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities in conjunction with residential development. The locality has seen significant residential development in recent years which has delivered improved facilities nearby, and this application represents further delivery funded by CIL payments arising from local residential development.

Supplementary Planning Guidance – Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy

Supplementary Planning Guidance is relevant, Wokingham Borough Council Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy. The overview is sports and recreational facilities are a vital source of enjoyment and well-being to the local community.

Planning Policy overview

With this application seeking to maintain, update and enhance an existing recreation and open space provision, the principle is considered to be entirely policy compliant.

THE PROPOSALS

The proposals are considered to be a comprehensive overhaul to provide improved facilities, as follows;

- Recreation ground car park – enlarging the width of the car park to increase the capacity and bring the central maneuvering space up to standard, a shortcoming with the current arrangement that results in it not being used which in turn increases on-street parking.
- Tennis Club car park – an extension to the tennis club car park to increase capacity.
- New tennis court – an additional tennis court for general use, separate from Shinfield Tennis Club.
- New padel tennis courts – padel tennis is a fast-growing sport, and the improvement seek to provide the first facility of its kind the area within a recreation ground setting.
- New basketball/netball courts – 2 courts offering both uses
- New 3G court – offering a variety of uses, 5-a-side football, walking football, walking rugby etc, making it potentially beneficial to a wide range of the community
- Fitness zone – a serviced facility offering fitness training by appointment to all age ranges. It consists of a covered area and an open space area, catering for year-round use
- Equipment storage and Climbing wall – the upkeep and maintenance of the site requires an associated storage provision which is proposed to be catered for using two 20ft shipping containers as they offer the benefit of being cost-effective, readily available, and secure. In order to provide an improved appearance and consequential benefit, its proposed to the sides of the container are fitted with a traverse climbing wall to provide a climbing facility at ground level.
- Exercise track – a 1.5m wide loop path around the perimeter of the central open grass area, providing a walking or jogging facility. The path features discrete bollard lighting to allow year-round use.

- Events mound – the groundworks element of forming the new pitches gives rise to a volume of spoil. Rather than carting it away from site, the proposal is to utilize it on site to form an events mound – a circa 2m high raised platform in effect, with sloped sides all round, offering a stage area for community events such as outside cinema, outside music in conjunction with events such as a village fete etc. As well as offering a facility, it also has the environmental benefits of omitting HGV vehicle movements associated with carting soil away.
- Pump track – a facility in conjunction with the events mound which also benefits from the use of spoil arising from the works, to create a purpose-built track for cycling consisting of rollers and banked turns ridden completely by riders ‘pumping’ – generating momentum by up-and-down body movements rather than pedaling.

Primarily these features are located towards the perimeter of the site, allowing a generous grass area to be maintained within the main body of the site to ensure it still serves a purpose of a general recreation area for residents.

SPORTS FACILITIES

Traditionally, Millworth Lane has provided sports pitches for football and cricket. However, the site isn't ideal for this due to its limited size, which leads to safety concerns with cricket balls often being hit into the adjacent tennis courts. Recent improvements on nearby sites now provide better facilities for these sports with Manor Ground opening in April 2022 providing two football pitches and a cricket square. A similar arrangement is also being constructed at High Copse Pavilion with football pitches ready from September 2025 and the cricket square from April 2026. In addition there are two further pitches being provided on Hyde End Lane. As a result, cricket and football doesn't feature as part of the future offering at Millworth Lane – the site isn't suited for it and there are now better facilities nearby. This doesn't represent a loss to community facilities, it simply means the provision is elsewhere.

HIGHWAYS & ACCESS

There are 2 salient points arising from the proposals;

- Football and cricket matches were the 2 activities that caused the largest number of vehicles to come to site at any one time. With those sports being relocated, that peak in traffic movement has been designed out.
- Millworth Lane isn't able to accommodate on-street parking by vehicles utilising the recreation ground, and it's therefore important that the on-site parking facility is improved.

The existing car park is circa 8m in width, too narrow for easy parking and turning, with the end result being that even when the entrance gates were open, patrons often opted to take the easier option of parking in the road. To overcome this and increase the capacity, the width increases to just over 16m – sufficient for 2 rows of 5m long parking bays, plus the standard 6m wide turning space in between.

Whilst the overall offering at the recreation ground is being enhanced, it's anticipated that nearby residents will see an improvement to traffic in the immediate vicinity, with all cars being able to be accommodated within the site.

Access remains unaffected as a result of the works. The primary direction of approach for users of the recreation ground arriving either by car or on foot remains via Hyde End Road, then into Millworth Lane. The primary access into the recreation ground itself remains via the shared pedestrian and vehicular access located in the northern-most corner of the recreation ground.

A secondary access element of the proposals is for a service vehicle to access the recreation ground for the purposes of maintaining the sewage treatment plant serving the tennis club WC. This is by way of a gated access within the extended tennis club car park then via a widened portion of the exercise track within the recreation ground, with the vehicle path indicated on the drawings. Note that this isn't a regular requirement, it's a once-a-year service at most and the proposal is for the vehicle movement to be supervised by a banksman to ensure safety.

TREES AND LANDSCAPE

The existing site benefits from established tree screening to the north western and south western boundaries, all of which remains. The application is accompanied by a BS5837 Tree Survey and Impact Assessment. To summarise the conclusions, the south western boundary of the 3G court has minor encroachment into root protection zones, and this is overcome by adopting a permeable and 'no-dig' approach to the pitch construction. All other elements of the work are outside all root protection areas.

ECOLOGY

The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment. Nothing of great interest was encountered at the site in ecology terms, although the assessment also contains proposals for the scheme to deliver the necessary Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with planning policy requirements.

It's also acknowledged that floodlighting is relevant to ecology. The existing tennis courts have floodlighting, which was successfully implemented using hooded light fittings to ensure it's only the playing area which is illuminated, avoiding light spill into the wider area. The intention is for the new tennis court, padel tennis courts, basketball/netball courts and the 3G court to also be flood lit. The proposals is to follow a similar method of hooded light fittings, and also an undertaking that the lighting will be switched off during periods when the courts are not in use.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Parish Council have undertaken consultation with the local community, consisting of an advertised open day at School Green Centre to introduce the project, and a targeted consultation with the residents of Millworth Lane. The findings have been incorporated into the scheme.

CONCLUSION

This proposal is for works that are appropriate to the enjoyment of the established sports and recreational use at the site. They seek to improve an established community facility in a way which is compatible with the immediate surroundings. The proposals are considered to meet planning policy requirements and its therefore respectfully requested that the application is considered favourably.