

PLANNING REF : 242598
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 32 Westall Street
: Shinfield, Berks
: RG29RL
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Mark James Hughes
DATE SUBMITTED : 13/11/2024

COMMENTS:

Dear Planning Authority/Committee,

I am writing to formally object to the full application for the proposed modifications to the existing recreational facilities, which includes the removal of existing infrastructure and the installation of new sports pitches, fitness areas, and other features. While the intent behind these changes may be to enhance recreational options, there are significant concerns related to the loss of existing football facilities and other potential impacts that should be carefully considered before approval.

Loss of Football Facilities:

One of the most pressing concerns is the proposed reduction or alteration of existing football facilities, which currently serve a large number of local football clubs, community groups, and individual players. These facilities are integral to providing access to organized sports, youth development, and physical activity for a diverse and growing community. The loss of these pitches or their reduction in size would have a direct and detrimental impact on the ability of these groups to continue their activities. Football is a hugely popular sport in the area, and removing or altering these facilities risks displacing numerous teams, reducing opportunities for community engagement, and undermining the health and well-being of many local residents who rely on these facilities for regular exercise and team sports.

Inadequate Replacement of Football Pitches:

While the application proposes new sports pitches and modifications to existing ones, there is no clear evidence or assurance that the replacement facilities will adequately meet the demand for football. Football is a high-demand sport, and without proper consultation with local clubs and teams, it is unclear whether the new provisions will accommodate current usage levels or allow for future growth. It is essential that the planning application ensures an adequate number of full-size football pitches, as well as sufficient training areas, to maintain community engagement in the sport.

Overdevelopment of the Site:

The proposal includes a wide range of new features, including an events mound, climbing wall, fitness zone, pump track, and exercise track, alongside substantial new car parking. While these developments may cater to some community needs, they risk overburdening the site, reducing the amount of available open space for general recreational use. The site must strike a balance between active sports facilities and areas for passive recreation, and there are concerns that the extensive developments could crowd out existing green spaces, leaving fewer opportunities for informal

play, relaxation, or community gatherings.

Increased Traffic and Parking Issues:

The addition of more car parking spaces to accommodate the increased demand from additional users of the recreational site raises concerns about local traffic management. Increased car usage may lead to congestion in the surrounding area, affecting both residents and visitors. Local roads may not be able to cope with additional traffic, leading to safety issues and a decline in air quality. The impact on traffic flows, especially during peak usage times, should be carefully assessed and mitigated in the planning process.

Environmental Impact:

The removal of existing infrastructure such as the cricket square, practice nets, and concrete bases will likely have environmental consequences, particularly in relation to wildlife habitats and drainage patterns. Any new developments, including the pump track, fitness zone, and other infrastructure, must ensure that the local environment is protected. It is crucial that the site's biodiversity and natural features are not unduly impacted by these changes, and that proper environmental assessments are carried out to avoid long-term ecological damage.

Insufficient Consultation with the Local Community:

While the proposal may seek to modernize and diversify recreational facilities, there has been limited consultation with the local community, particularly those who currently use the football ties. It is vital that the views of local football clubs, community groups, and residents are fully considered. Without proper consultation, there is a risk that the developments will not meet the real needs of the people who use these spaces on a daily basis.

Impact on Local Sports Development:

The proposed changes could hinder the development of local sports programs, especially in football, which is an important tool for youth development and community cohesion. Football clubs, especially at the youth level, rely on sufficient, accessible facilities to offer training and match opportunities. The loss of adequate football pitches will make it harder for these clubs to operate effectively, which could have long-term consequences for the community's sporting culture.

In conclusion, while the proposed developments may offer benefits in some areas, they present significant challenges for local football facilities, community engagement, and the overall sustainability of recreational services. I urge the planning committee to reconsider the proposal, particularly with regard to the loss of football pitches, and to ensure that any changes made meet the long-term needs of the local population. A more balanced approach is needed, one that retains key facilities while enhancing the site with the full support of the local community.