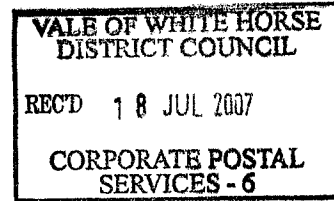


12th July 2007

Miss Laura Hudson
Planning and Community Strategy
Vale of White Horse
Abbey House
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 3JE



Our Ref: SE/VW/2007/12482/N

Dear Miss Hudson,

App No: 07/00915/FUL

Proposal: Demolition of existing houses, squash courts and tennis courts. Erection of hotel (Land South of Curie Avenue) and leisure club, spa and bar (Land North of Curie Avenue). Re-submission

Site: Land to North and South of Curie Avenue, Harwell International Business Centre, Harwell, Didcot

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Sport England has considered the application in the light of its Interim Policy Statement 'Planning for Sport & Active Recreation: Objectives & Opportunities'. The overall thrust of the statement is that a planned approach to the provision of facilities and opportunities for sport is necessary in order to ensure the sport and recreational needs of local communities are met.

The proposals do not affect any playing fields however there is an impact on the existing squash club and tennis courts. The squash club comprises 4 squash courts and within the boundary of the application there are currently 3 hard surfaced tennis courts. On the campus there are also 3 grass courts and one hard surfaced court and it is understood that these have been converted to 3 hard courts to enable all year around play. These courts are outside the boundary of the application site.

The proposals would provide a health club comprising a swimming pool (150 sq m.), a steam room and sauna, changing rooms and showers, treatment rooms, floatation room, a relaxation room, a gym (150 sq m.) and a studio.

The proposal would result in the loss of existing built sports facilities namely 4 squash and 3 tennis courts.

The applicants have submitted a supporting statement on the sporting benefits of the proposals. Sport England considers that of the leisure facilities provided, those which would

benefit sport and contribute to its objective of increasing participation are the pool, the gym and the studio depending on its use. For the record, treatments rooms and saunas do not constitute sporting activities. The applicants paragraph 5.7 acknowledges this.

The applicants claim that there is a potential for 1000 members although they estimate a figure of 750 is more likely. The size of the sports facilities however will limit the numbers of people able to use the facilities at any one time and could be a disincentive to membership. The pool has a regular area of 12.5 x 7 metres. The gym is 14.5 x 10.5 metres which it is claimed would accommodate 40 stations.

The applicants have stated that the squash club have 70 members but this is disputed by the squash club who have told Sport England that they currently have 180 members of which over 100 regularly play squash. The members who are mostly employed on the campus and rely on playing squash at lunchtimes - their peak period of the day. The location of the courts provides the convenience of being able to play at lunchtime without the need to travel. Traveling to the other squash clubs referred to by the applicants to play squash would not be practical during the working day. The existence of 4 squash courts on this site also represents a significant facility in the District.

The nearest alternative squash courts (2 No.) are at Didcot Leisure Centre, 3 miles away. The next nearest (2 No.) are nearly 7 miles away at White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre in Abingdon. In contrast, within a 4 mile radius of the application site according to the Active Places website (www.activeplaces.com) there are 4 fitness facilities with a total of 271 stations. This suggests that the benefits of the proposed fitness room in the District will not be significant.

Within 3 miles of the application site, there are 2 swimming pools at Didcot Wave Pool (25m with 6 lanes) and at the Park Club (20m with 4 lanes). The size of the pool proposed is unlikely to be attractive to many users for fitness swimming and given the proximity of these larger pools would not add significantly to the sporting benefits in the locality.

The reduction in the numbers of tennis courts is also a concern albeit this has been partly addressed by the resurfacing works described above. Sport England understands that there is concern from the tennis club that there will be a shortage of courts for casual users when there is a match in progress against other clubs.

Sport England is not convinced therefore that the proposals would generate the overall benefits to sport suggested by the applicants. Our main concern remains the complete loss of a significant squash facility used by an established club. Sport England therefore objects to the application.

Sport England would be seeking the retention of at least two of the squash courts or their replacement on the campus as part of this scheme in order to maintain the viability of the club.



I would be grateful if you would advise me of the outcome of the application by sending me a copy of the decision notice. If you would like any further information or advice please contact me at the address below.

Yours sincerely

M. Anson

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