

WAN/20297 – Vale of White Horse District Council

Proposed new access onto A417. Erection of new building to accommodate football changing rooms and Wantage Silver Band. New lighting for football area, car parking and landscaping. Sports Ground, Lark Hill, Wantage, Oxon, OX12 8PJ.

1.0 The Proposal

- 1.1 The application proposes a new access onto the A417 and the erection of a new building which would include football changing rooms, two large halls, store rooms, practice rooms and other ancillary accommodation which is primarily for the use by Wantage Silver Band, and Wantage Concordes Football Club. The proposal also includes new lighting for the football training area, car parking and landscaping.
- 1.2 The site was previously used by Garston Lane Primary School as its playing field, and has been retained as playing fields after the demolition of the school. The site currently has no buildings and only has pedestrian access off Lark hill.
- 1.3 The building would measure a maximum of 36 metres by 28 metres with a ridge height of 8 metres. The building is of a barn style with a number of gable features and a cat-slide roof with low eaves. The building would be located within the north east corner of the field. A total of forty car parking spaces are proposed at the north of the site adjacent to the proposed building.
- 1.4 The site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 1.5 Extracts from the application drawings are attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.6 The application comes to Committee as the application is submitted by the Vale of White Horse.

2.0 Planning History

- 2.1 None relevant

3.0 Planning Policies

- 3.1 Policy DC1 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan requires development to be of a high design quality in terms of layout, scale, mass, height, detailing, materials to be used, and its relationship with adjoining buildings, and to take into account local distinctiveness.
- 3.2 Policy DC3 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan requires that the design and layout of new buildings and spaces are arranged to increase security and deter crime.
- 3.2 Policy DC5 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan requires safe and convenient access and parking.

- 3.3 Policy DC6 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan requires hard and soft landscaping.
- 3.4 Policy DC9 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan seeks to ensure development that will not unacceptably harm the amenities of neighbouring properties and the wider environment.
- 3.5 Policy DC14 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan seeks to resist development which would generate surface run-off so as to increase the risk of flooding and changes in ground water levels.
- 3.6 Policy NE6 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan seeks to ensure development will only be permitted if the beauty of the landscape will be conserved or enhanced.
- 3.7 Policy TR4 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan requires the needs of pedestrians and cyclists to be taken into account.
- 3.8 Policy L1 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan states that development on existing outdoor play space will only be permitted if any existing deficiency in such space will not be added to, or a deficiency will be created.
- 3.9 Policy L8 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan states that small scale development for open space, sport and recreation will be permitted within or on the edge of settlements provided they meet an identified local need, are not harmful to the surrounding area, and do not have a detrimental effect on the ecology of the area.

4.0 **Consultations**

- 4.1 Wantage Town Council “does not object to the application and welcomes the facility, but recommend additional warning traffic signs be installed at the entrance of the site.
Members also voiced their concern as to the proposed time that the flood lighting of the area would be permitted.”
- 4.2 The County Engineer raises no significant objections that cannot be addressed. The County Engineer’s recommendations and comments can be seen in Appendix 2.
- 4.3 Sport England comments as follows: “The proposed development is ancillary to the principle use of the site as a playing field or playing fields, and does not affect the quantity or quality of pitches or adversely affect their use.”
- 4.4 The Principle Drainage Engineer has no objections subject to conditions and informatives.
- 4.5 Thames Valley Police have no objections but make recommendations and comments which can be seen in Appendix 3.

4.6 Wantage Silver Band have submitted a Supporting Statement. This can be summarised as follows:

- The band has a present membership of about 180
- Until 2001 the band leased a hall within Newbury Street, Wantage, however the building was required to be demolished, and the band was obliged to leave
- The band then used Garston Lane School, but this site had also been earmarked for demolition, and the band had to vacate
- The band have been looking for a suitable site since leaving Newbury Street and have been investigating many options, carrying out feasibility schemes, acoustic testing and asking organisations if they had suitable accommodation
- Since vacating Newbury Street the band has used a variety of different locations, mainly schools and village halls. However these are primarily used for different uses and the band has to fit practice sessions around their timetables
- Music and instruments are stored in member's houses, and meetings/social events have to be organised in homes or in other halls. The movement of instruments from hall to hall causes expensive wear and tear resulting in unnecessary costs and time and effort in organising the logistics
- The Senior band rehearses twice a week; more so when coming up to a contest
- The junior and training band rehearses once a week
- On Saturday the band have a trainer band, a youth band, a beginner group and individual lessons therefore the band needs room for two bands rehearsing at the same time
- The band have a huge library of music, chairs and tables, and several sets of percussion and spare instruments
- The band are one of the largest banding organisations in the country
- The band have 7 different playing groups, and members age from 5 to 80 with two thirds being young people
- The band has always encouraged new membership, providing suitable instruments and instruction, irrespective of background, age or ability
- The site known as Tugwell Field was first mentioned by the District Council in 2003 as a possible site for a new band hall
- Various studies have been conducted and confirmed the suitability of the site
- The hall will be available for use by other community and private groups
- There is a shortage of halls for use of local clubs and groups
- A high level of noise transfer can be reduced by landscaping/external noise prevention methods, and careful design
- If the band is to continue to fulfil its aims to grow, it needs its own dedicated hall, without which the band's future is in jeopardy

4.7 36 letters of support and 9 letters of objection have been received; and a further 3 letters have been received making comments and asking questions.

The letters of support can be summarised as follows:

- The new facility would be a great asset to the community
- Wantage is not blessed with facilities, organisations or desirable activities for children and youths
- There is a need for community arts resources in Wantage, and this proposal would go some way to fulfill that need
- The proposal could encompass some of the activities which currently occur in St Mary's Arts Centre (which is due to be demolished under the scheme submitted by Berkeley Homes)
- The band has approximately 180 members and has no permanent home at present
- The existing situation of rehearsing in various locations is unsustainable
- The band is an important part of Wantage life, performing at various functions
- Both Wantage Concorde and Wantage Silver Band have been in existence for many years and have many active members from the local community; and it is good that they finally get a custom built home of their own which meets their needs
- The large band requires an adequate building to house rehearsals, music lessons and storage of instruments and music
- The proposal would enable the band to continue its work introducing young and old to music
- The building would be sound proofed; and therefore noise to neighbours would not be a problem
- The proposal will provide a much needed facility to allow the football club to continue and prosper
- The scale of the development for football is in keeping with the area
- The pitch would only generally be used at weekends
- Low scale and low level floodlighting is essential to allow children a safe and secure place to train when dark
- The proposal will be a facility available to the community at large
- The proposal would reduce car use as it is in the town
- The building will be managed by a strong management team

The letters of objection can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed building would have an adverse effect on the character of the area; being adjacent to the countryside
- The proposal changes the nature of the area from rural to urban, and extends the town of Wantage into the AONB
- The footprint and height make the building obtrusive
- Concerns raised with regard to noise, the impact of light from the floodlights, pollution from cars and the generation of rubbish
- Concern raised with regard to the noise late at night
- The access will be dangerous for cars turning into the site
- The proposal would result in the loss of existing playing fields
- There would be no limitations on the groups of people that could use the facility
- Concern raised with regard to the possibility of an alcohol licence
- The proposal is clearly not just a sports pavilion

- Concerns raised with regard to crime
 - Parking provision seems to be insufficient
 - More fencing would need to be provided to stop people climbing over fences to collect balls
 - Deciduous trees only provide limited cover and will be inadequate in winter
 - Water drainage is not satisfactorily dealt with
 - Not enough room has been left to plant trees along the Reading side of the site
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- Concern raised with regard to the safety of the proposed new access
 - Concern over the use of Lark Hill as an overflow car park
 - The south elevation appears to have been ignored in the plans
 - Concern raised that Sport England have not been consulted
 - Charlton Court is shown as a builders yard on the submitted plans
 - The proposal is for a change of use as there are currently no buildings on the site
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- There is a discrepancy in the access arrangements as shown on the plans
 - The use of the land for the band is contrary to the Local Plan

Further letters containing comments and questions can be summarised as follows:

- Request that a solid fence be erected at the western boundary of the sports field to protect the privacy of residents in Lark Hill
 - The proposal to move the 30mph zone further east is welcomed
 - The visual impact of the floodlighting is unclear
 - Will the band be the sole users of the building?
 - What restrictions will be placed on practice and performance times?
 - Is a public Entertainment and Alcohol Licence required?
 - Concern raised with regard to future ownership and utilisation of the development
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- Concern raised with regard to the closing of the existing pedestrian access
 - Is safe pedestrian access being considered?
 - What is the proposal doing to address the environmental/sustainability agenda?

5.0 **Officer Comments**

- 5.1 The application site lies within the AONB and on the edge of Wantage where a proposal of this size would not normally be acceptable. It is therefore important to assess whether in this instance there are any special circumstances which would allow a development which would otherwise be unacceptable. The development in part proposes football changing rooms which Officers consider to be ancillary to the use of the site as a playing field. However, a large proportion of the building is for the use by Wantage Silver Band. This is a well established 'community' group with a large membership base, which has been looking for a permanent home for a number of years. Due to their large membership base, the associated equipment such as music, instruments, tables and chairs, together with any 'noise' associated with instrument playing, the applicants have stated that a building of this size specifically designed for the band in terms of the accommodation provided and the noise mitigation methods

which can be designed into the proposal, is required. Whilst no information on alternative sites for such a proposal have been submitted as part of this planning application, it is understood Wantage Silver Band has been in consultation with the Council's Parks and Landscape Department for some time, and this site was considered to be the only suitable site.

- 5.2 Officers note that the proposal would result in the loss of a part of the existing field; however this area is not currently used as a formal playing area. Furthermore, the football changing rooms are ancillary to the use of the field. Sport England raises no objection in this regard.
- 5.3 Officers consider that the proposed building is relatively large, however as stated it has been designed to meet the needs of the large Wantage Silver Band, and the local Wantage Concorde Football Club. Whilst the building would be located within the AONB, and on the edge of Wantage, it is bounded by residential properties to the west and south, and the relatively new Chalton Court development to the north (albeit this is slightly to the west). It is therefore considered that the proposed development would be viewed in the context of these neighbouring properties, and in the wider context of Wantage when viewed from the east. Officers recognise that there would be some harm to the AONB as the proposed building would be located in the corner of the field furthest from any built form, and next to open countryside to the east. However it is considered that in this instance the community benefit of the proposal outweighs any such harm. Furthermore it is noted that the site is already used for community purposes, and any negative impact on the character of the area could be mitigated by the provision of a landscaping scheme, to be approved by the Council.
- 5.4 In this regard it needs to be noted that whilst the proposal would be visible from the A417, there is existing dense vegetative screening along the sites northern boundary. Whilst some of this would be lost for the provision of the new access, the remainder could be conditioned to be retained by way of a condition. It should also be noted that the building is only 8 metres high; which is approximately the same height as an average 2-storey dwelling.
- 5.5 The proposed building is considered to be of an acceptable design with feature gables, a low eaves height and timber materials to try and harmonise its appearance with the landscape. The Police Crime Prevention Officer has raised some concern with regard to the potential for crime. It is considered that conditions, such as the provision of a landscaping scheme, and a scheme for lighting could mitigate some of these concerns. It should be noted that the scheme has been amended to provide some level of overlooking into the car park area following concerns from the Police Crime Prevention Officer. Whilst it is noted there is a large amount of glazing to the rear, this is to help create an inter-relationship between the building and the football pitch.
- 5.6 As stated above the building is proposed to be located within the furthest north east corner of the field. Whilst this separates it somewhat from the surrounding built form, it does locate it a considerable distance from any neighbouring dwellings. Concerns have been raised with regard to noise and disturbance from the proposed

development. In terms of noise from the building itself Officers consider this could be mitigated by a condition requiring a scheme of sound insulation to be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. Concerns have also been raised with regard to noise from football games, however the site already has a lawful use as a playing field, and football games could be played without the requirement of any planning permission. Whilst it is noted that the proposed extra facilities such as changing rooms and flood lighting may intensify this use, these are considered to be reasonable facilities in association with the current use of the site as a playing field.

- 5.7 Notwithstanding the above it is noted that the proposed training facility would be located quite close to the rear/side boundary of the property Baronia, and the property currently only has a wire fence as its boundary treatment. The proposed floodlights are of a low luminance and would therefore only provide enough light for the proposed training area. In order to protect the amenities of the occupiers of Baronia the luminance level could be conditioned as proposed, with light hoods or louvers added if required. A condition could also be imposed restricting their hours of use, and requiring the lights to be checked after their erection in order to mitigate any impact on neighbouring properties. Given the existing common boundary treatment with Baronia, and the location of the new training area it is considered reasonable to request a suitable boundary treatment plus planting along this boundary.
- 5.8 Officers note the proposed access and parking area would create some level of noise and disturbance to neighbouring residents. However Officers note the A417 is a busy 60mph road which in itself creates a certain level of noise and disturbance. Given that the existing speed limit along this section would be reduced to 30mph, and that the hours of operation of the building could be restricted to mitigate any impact on neighbouring occupiers, it is considered unreasonable to object in this regard. Officers note that the parking area would be located more than 12 metres from the rear boundary of No.1 Lark Hill, and more than 30 metres from the dwellings in Chalton Court. Due to its distance from neighbouring dwellings the building is not considered to result in a visually intrusive or overbearing impact on neighbouring properties.
- 5.9 The Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted in 2006 recommends 1 car parking space per 22 square metres of floor area. This would require approximately 40 car parking spaces, which the development proposes. However as commented by the County Engineer no provision including turning area has been provided for large vehicles such as a coach, therefore notwithstanding the details shown on the plan a parking plan would be required to be submitted and approved showing turning space for a single coach. It is noted that gates are to be provided, however these are approximately 10 metres back from the highway, as required by the County Engineer. The County Engineer has raised no objection to the proposal provided a number of recommended conditions are attached to any permission granted, together with a Section 278 Agreement relating to the provision of footways and crossing points, and a Section 106 Agreement for the provision of funding to move the speed limit sign.

6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *It is recommended that the decision to grant planning permission be delegated to the Deputy Director (Planning and Community Strategy) in consultation with the Committee Chair, and including conditions. Time Limit, materials for building and hardsurfacing, sound proofing scheme, landscaping including retention of northern boundary (except access), boundary treatment for southern boundary of site, luminence levels and hoods of flood lights, checking of flood lighting after their erection, hours of operation of flood lighting and building, lighting scheme for car park, approval of drainage details, provision of parking and turning plan, details of proposed gate, plan of vision splays and vehicle 'tracking', and provision of pedestrian access to the site prior to first use of building*