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Our reference: 21/01453/PREAPP

Date: 18 June 2021

Mr Allan Jones
21 Parkhill Road
Bexley
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DA5 1HF

BY EMAIL

Dear Allan,

Re: Installation of a water borehole, storage tank and pump room at the Southern corner of the site together with a "pop-up" irrigation system to water the outfield of the cricket table

Bexley Cricket Club, Manor Way, Bexley, Kent, DA5 3QG

Thank you for engaging with the London Borough of Bexley's pre-application service. We hope you have found the process useful in developing your proposals.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The application site relates to the grounds of Bexley Cricket Club. The site is roughly rectangular in shape, measures approximately 1.9 hectares and is located south west of Bexley village. Access is via Manor Road from the north. With the exception of the pavilion (located in the north west), the site is mostly open land. The land is situated within the Green Belt and is also designated Heritage Land. It is also located within a Contaminated Land Consultation Zone and Landfill Site Buffer zone.

PROPOSAL

This pre-application seeks advice on the potential installation of a water borehole, storage tank and pump room at the Southern corner of the site together with a "pop-up" irrigation system to water the outfield of the cricket table.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

21/00311/FUL: Installation of a water borehole, storage tank and pump room at the Southern corner of the site together with a "pop-up" irrigation system to water the outfield of the cricket table. Withdrawn (further discussions needed)

11/01979/FUL: Erection of an electronic, remote controlled, scoreboard for use during cricket matches. Approved.

09/01036/FUL: Single storey side extension with provision of a ramp. Approved.

05/04024/FUL: Provision of 2.75 metre high steel security fencing. Approved.

04/02023/FUL: Extension to existing clubhouse and provision of canopy to front entrance. Approved.

01/01862/FUL: Single storey kitchen extension to pavilion. Approved.

96/01801/FUL: New kitchen, showers and changing room extension. Approved.

92/01808/FUL: Single storey extensions to provide a Beer Store and a toilet to the existing pavilion. Approved.

92/00758/FUL: Change of use from Squash Club (Class D2) to Dance School/Centre (Class D1). Approved.

86/01783/FUL: Extension to existing cricket pavilion. Approved.

84/00841/FUL: Use of pavilion as nursery school, Monday to Friday from 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. Approved.

81/00125/FUL: Construction of bottle shop. Approved.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

The Development Plan

The adopted Development Plan for the London Borough of Bexley comprises the London Plan (2021), Bexley's Core Strategy (2012), and saved elements of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2004, as saved from 2012).

The Core Strategy sets out a spatial planning framework for the borough until 2026.

The UDP is arranged into Part 1, which sets out the Council's general strategy and policies; Part 2, which sets out to detail policies and proposals for a range of topics,

together with their justifications; the Design and Development Control Guidelines, which expand the policies by setting out a number of detailed planning and environmental considerations that will be taken into account in the determination of planning applications; and an Appendices section.

These documents are in general conformity with the London Plan (2021). This document provides the overall strategic plan for London, setting out an integrated economic, environmental, transport and social framework for the development of London over the next 20–25 years.

The following advice contains reference to relevant planning policies within these documents. These are all available to view in full on (or via) the council's website: <https://www.bexley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-and-guidance>

Other Material Considerations

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019)

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The main considerations include:

- Principle of Green Belt Development
- Environmental Health

ASSESSMENT

Principle of the Development within the Green Belt

The cricket club is located within the Green Belt. London Plan Policy G2 set out that development in the Green Belt should be considered in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Chapter 13 of the NPPF discusses the acceptability of development within the Green Belt. It states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. This is supported by Core Strategy Policies CS01 and CS17 and UDP Policies ENV4 and ENV5.

NPPF Paragraphs 145 and 146 highlight the forms of development within the Green Belt which may be considered to be appropriate. Most of these are irrelevant to the current scheme. However, the proposal could be considered under criteria 'b':

“b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”

As can be seen, criteria 'b' consists of three key parts which must all be demonstrated by the applicant within their submission:

1. That the development is for the provision of appropriate facilities in connection with outdoor sports/recreation
2. The development preserves the openness of the Green Belt, and
3. The development does not conflict with any other purposes of the Green Belt

Appropriate Facilities

The Position Paper supplied as part of this Pre-Application submission sets out that the water tank and pump room are to be used in connection with outdoor sports facilities. It supposes that the pitches at the cricket club are almost entirely dependent upon the rain fall in order to maintain the quality of its condition, a supply which has been drastically reduced in recent years. It is recognised that sufficient volume of water is required to water the cricket outfield and practice area (approximately 6 acres) in order to maintain it fit for and safe for sporting activity.

It is also understood that the sinking of a borehole, installation of a water storage tank together with a pop-up sprinkler system for the outfield has been recommended as the most appropriate solution by professional water irrigation and grounds maintenance experts, as the sprinkler system would provide controlled out of hours watering and thus keep the pitches appropriately watered and in significantly improved condition.

In consideration of this, Officers agree that the proposal is for appropriate facilities in connection with the cricket club (i.e. outdoor sports).

Impact on Openness

The second issue is whether the proposed facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

The courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account when assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt. These include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

The construction of a roughly 2.5m tall, 9m wide water tank and the associated pump station would have, by virtue of their mass and scale, impact upon the openness within the Green Belt.

What the Council needs to understand (and what was not provided with the withdrawn application) is a justification of why a water tank this size is necessary, why it must be this size, and why it has been chosen in the current location. Essentially, it should be shown that protecting the openness was the key factor in the decision making for all of the above.

Much of this has actually been covered quite convincingly within the Position Paper. For example, highlighting how only two capacity sizes of water storage tank fit the necessary storage requirements, and whilst the alternative is lower in height, it is also greater in circumference and this would result in the removal of trees. Also, that the option of setting the tank further into the ground to reduce its overall height is not achievable due to the close proximity of the various tree roots. The Position Paper also demonstrates (and this was further shown on the virtual site visit) that the water tank and pump station are to be sited on land which is at least 1m below the ground floor level of the nearby road and neighbouring properties and are to be enclosed by numerous existing trees and a 3m hedge row, therefore mitigating views of the development from nearby vantage points. These are all strong arguments but need to be linked back to the NPPF policy in any full planning application.

Conflicting with Other Purposes of the Green Belt

The five key purposes of the Green Belt are set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF. They are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

It is not considered that a proposal of this nature would conflict with the five key purposes of the Green Belt.

Environmental Health

Core Strategy CS09 states the Council will apply national and regional standards to energy, air and water quality, water and sewerage infrastructure, noise reduction, contaminated land and hazardous substances.

UPD Policy ENV39 states that in determining applications for development the Council will consider the extent to which the proposal has any unreasonable effect on the surrounding area by reason of any emissions to land, air, or water.

The cricket club is located within a landfill site buffer zone and contaminated land consultation zone. Contaminated Land and Environmental Health officers were consulted as part of this pre-app. In both instances, the officers stated they would defer to advice provided by the Environment Agency. The Environmental Agency were also consulted as part of this application but as of writing have not responded. However, the

applicant has stated that they have already informally reached out to them and have received a positive response.

Next Steps

Moving forward, the key to a successful application is to ensure that the submitted plans are of a suitable quality and that proposal is supported with a convincing argument justifying the development within its Green Belt location. If these are appropriate, then the Council would likely be willing to support the scheme. In terms of drawings/plans, these will need to be professionally drawn and we will require the following:

- Completed Application Form
- Signed Ownership and Agricultural Holdings Certificate
- Site Location Plan (1:1250)
- Existing Site / Block Plan (1:250 / 1:500)
- Proposed Site / Block Plan (1:250 / 1:500)
- Proposed Elevations of the pump station (1:100)
- Suppliers brochure of water tank with details, measurements provided or annotated dimensions

Alongside these, you will be required to submit a Planning Statement justifying why the works are appropriate development within the Green Belt. The Position Paper submitted with this pre-app has covered a lot of this ground already, but it needs to be linked back to criteria c of the paragraph 145 of the NPPF and clearly demonstrate how the proposal is compliant with the requirements of it.

OTHER MATTERS

Planning Obligations & CIL

Bexley's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) came into force on 30th April 2015. CIL is a system of planning charges for the funding of infrastructure to help make new development sustainable. It has largely replaced the previous system of Section 106 planning obligations except for securing site mitigation measures and affordable housing provision.

Further details of Bexley's CIL can be found on the Council's website: <https://www.bexley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-building-control/planning/community-infrastructure-levy-cil>

In addition to the above, the proposal would be liable for the Mayoral CIL, which is charged at £25 per square metre (plus indexation) of net additional floorspace.

CIL is payable on commencement of development.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Council would like to support the club with the aim of safeguarding the long-term viability of cricket and associated community facilities within Bexley. However, given the sensitive nature of the site, in particular the Green Belt allocation of the land, the applicant will need to justify the need, scale and location of the development in reference to the relevant NPPF policy. Moreover, the application should be supported by professionally drawn plans, which are to scale. Finally, due to contamination concerns, the support of the scheme will also hinge on the feedback from the Environment Agency, although as far it seems, from conversations with the applicant, that they are already on board. Nonetheless, a formal response from them will be sought and needed with any full application.

This pre-application advice follows an initial officer assessment of the information you have provided. Every formal application is subject to a statutory assessment process and it is only then that a full assessment of all the material planning considerations can be made in the context of relevant development plan policies. Some important considerations may only arise or become apparent during this formal process, which includes consultation with residents and other third parties affected by the development. This officer advice is therefore given for your general guidance in the preparation of a future planning application or proposal. The advice does not prejudice the Council's consideration or decision on any future application that may be submitted.

Yours sincerely,

Oliver Enticott
Principal Planner
Planning Department