

Oakley Green, Fifield & District Community Association



March 2, 2016

RBWM Planning and Property Services
Development Control
Town Hall
St Ives Road
Maidenhead
SL6 1RF

Dear Sirs,

Application: 15/02107/FULL

Proposal: Re-location of Phoenix Gym Club including building, access, car parking and landscaping.

Location: Land to the North of Longlea Nursing Home, Fifield Road, Fifield, Maidenhead.

This response on behalf of local Residents and the Association is being submitted out-with the February 9, 2016 deadline for comments. But given the subsequent publication by RBWM of two Reports which have a very significant bearing on this Application, namely:-

- The RBWM Fifield Road Traffic and Speed Survey conducted from January 22 to February 8 - published on February 11 and
- The External Consultants Report on Flood Risk and Drainage proposals - published on February 29

... we believe it is still appropriate to consider this letter **in Objection to this Planning Application.**

Location and Planning Policy

The site lies outside the Recognised Settlement Boundary for Fifield Village, within the Green Belt. It is also located in the recently designated "Bray Green Gap" as described in the Draft Bray Parish Neighbourhood Plan which says:-

"The Bray Green Gap between Windsor and Maidenhead is important in terms of maintaining the separate physical locations and identities of the towns of Windsor and Maidenhead and the rural identity of Bray Parish. The Bray Green Gap forms an important recreational, ecological and rural landscape corridor for residents of the Parish and an amenity for residents of the settlements either side. Bray Parish Residents want to halt any further deterioration of the remaining Green Belt between the outskirts of Windsor and Maidenhead and enhance the rural character of this landscape."

This Application clearly fails the Test of GB1 – which is to do with the types of Development which can take place in the Greenbelt

It also clearly fails the Test of GB2 which deals with

- impact on Openness of the Green Belt
- harming the Character of the Green Belt through the Scale and Siting of the Proposal - Material intensification of Activity - Permanent loss of Agricultural Land - and being Harmful to Residential Amenities

None of this is actually disputed by the Applicant!

Moving on to Policy DG1 – this Application fails

- Compatibility with the Street Facade and
- the Traffic generated by the Development which should not have an unacceptable impact on the local Road Network and the Environment of the locality.

So overall, this Proposal constitutes an Inappropriate Development in the Green Belt and would also result in a physical reduction in openness across the site. This means that the proposal can only be recommended for Approval if a case can be made that Very Special Circumstances (VSC) exist that would clearly overcome this harm.

The Application says inter alia that “the high level of participation and success of the club members within their sport and ... the extraordinary level of support for the proposal exhibits the very special circumstances necessary to make the proposal acceptable within the Green Belt.”

This is not the case when all the other potential elements of harm are considered in addition to Inappropriateness in the Green Belt.

Neighbours – Noise/Light/Air Pollution

The proposed development is on the Northern end of Fifield Village and located immediately next to the long established Longlea Nursing Home which is set within 2 acres of rural splendour. According to their Website, the Nursing Home can accommodate up to 22 people, mostly on the ground floor with just 5 rooms on the 1st floor.

And Footpath 51A runs along the Southern Boundary of the Site.

Having this size of Facility which will operate from 09:00 – 21:00 hours Monday to Friday and from 09:00 – 18:00 hours Saturday & Sunday will be Un-Neighbourly to the Nursing Home, Footpath users and nearby Residents due to the adverse impacts from Vehicular Traffic, Noise, Light and Air Pollution.

Scale and Visual Impact

The Gymnasium itself is huge – with a Ridge Height of 10.25 metres, which will interfere with the Visual Amenity of the area. The Application Form says the area of the Gym is 996 Square Metres and volume of 7730 Cubic Metres. It will dwarf all other Buildings nearby, including the Nursing Home next door.

The newly submitted Visual Impact Assessment in Paragraph 1.5 says “The visual impact assessment identified a total of 4 viewpoints with significant visual effects, representative of users of public rights of way (including footpaths) adjacent to the site which have direct views onto the site. The Site falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt.”

The whole Site was originally to be 1.86 hectares but has been expanded to make room for Water Containment Ponds and it is now 2.03 Hectares. Residents are asking the question: If the

Building is smaller now than in the original Application, why does the Site need to actually be nearly 10% bigger – unless Expansion is being planned in future?

Road Traffic and Safety

The Planning Application says “After the RBWM leisure centres in Maidenhead and Windsor, Phoenix Gymnastics Club has the highest footfall for sporting participants in the Borough with over 1000 children per week attending gymnastics sessions and a play gym.” Adding in Staff, Site deliveries, visiting Competitors and Gymnasts attending more than one Session per week all means a considerable total of Traffic movements per week. Parking provision has currently been made for 77 Cars and 8 Disabled Bays.

But currently The Phoenix Gym shares what amounts to a Private Drive with about 6 Houses and a few Industrial Properties which at most may currently generate say 50 Traffic Movements per day. This in effect gives current Gym Users little competition for access to and from the A308 throughout the day.

The big difference compared to the proposed Site is that the Phoenix Gym Traffic would be joining a huge volume of existing and unfortunately speeding Traffic on the Fifield Road - as confirmed by the recent RBWM Survey.

The Survey was carried out under the direction of Tony Carr - Traffic and Road Safety Manager - Highways and Transport - Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and we thank him for his cooperation in this matter.

The high Traffic Movement figures are explained by the fact that the Fifield Road and Roads immediately off are all Public Highways and have a total of 210 Houses on them. The road is also a cut through to and from the A308 and experiences congestion at both ends at many times during the day. And on top of this, the Fifield Road is currently heavily used by Horses, Riders and Grooms (many of them Children from Wayside Stables which is just a couple of hundred metres along the road), as well as Pedestrians and Dog Walkers.

In more detail - the Survey was conducted on the Fifield Road – just North of the 30 MPH Speed Limit Sign - immediately adjacent to the proposed Site. It recorded Traffic Volumes and Speeds in both directions for the 17 day period from 11:38 hours on Friday January 22 to 11:56 hours on Monday February 8, 2016.

On Traffic Numbers

Northbound – Typically over 1200 vehicles per day weekdays and 600 to 700 at weekends

Southbound – Typically over 1200 vehicles per day weekdays and 600 to 800 at weekends

In summary – over 15,000 Traffic Movements per week and most of it during Gym Opening Hours.

On Traffic Speed

Northbound – Typically 48% exceeded the Speed limit with a Max of 54 mph

Southbound – Typically 63 % exceeded the Speed limit with a Max of 59mph

On Safety

Speeding Traffic, the close proximity to a tight bend immediately to the South by the Entrance to the Nursing Home (a scene of Accidents in the past) and massively increased volumes will increase the Risk of Accidents.

Overall, the addition of Gym User Traffic could account for a doubling of the Traffic Volumes on the Fifield Road. And contrary to what the Application says, Gym Traffic will not be evenly spaced out over the day but will inevitably be bunched at Course/Session start and end times.

Future Gym Users, seeing the queue of Traffic trying to get on to the A308 at the Fifield Turn to the North would be severely tempted to turn left out of the Entrance and head South through the rural Village of Fifield – along Fifield Road (South) and Coningsby Lane (a one Track Road in parts).

Finally, the statement about the Bus Service being a “circa half-hourly frequency throughout the day” is factually incorrect since it was dramatically cut in February 2014.

Flooding

Local Residents identified Drainage and Flooding issues to be of high concern in a Resident’s Survey (with a 74% Response Rate) carried out by OGAFCA in 2009. As a result, we have been working on alleviating the challenges presented by Flooding in the local area with RBWM (and more recently their Consultants) for the past 7 years, so we have a deep understanding of the Drainage System locally.

The Site is wholly located in Flood Zone 1. The Revised Application now includes the Environment Agency Surface Water Flooding Map. This image alone should be enough to convince anyone that the Fifield Road is not a sensible location for a new build, when over a third of the proposed site is designated as “HIGH RISK”.

Our photo evidence (included on our Website) has been dismissed by Application Supporters as from exceptional years. But local Residents know that it doesn't need an exceptional year to produce very wet conditions indeed. It is an Annual Occurrence.

The Revised Application reduces the hard surface area - obviously relevant to runoff - but these tokens do not remove serious concerns and anomalies. Water from the 3 pools and car park sub-base is to stay on site, permeating to the largest pond to dissipate into the ground. Figures quoted claim a vastly over provided capacity to hold the water, but there appears to be no mention or allowance for RBWM’s own Flood Risk Manager's point that when they are most needed, the 3 pools will already be half full.

Local Residents know that not a lot of water simply disappears into the ground due to Surface Clay Soil conditions. If it is not led away, it stays where it is. On the other side of the Fifield Road, the old Biffa Landfill Site has a concrete area which is smaller than the proposed Phoenix parking area. This has edges of soil and scrub, and the surface is broken by many faults. Yet water run-off does NOT dissipate into the ground. After the single day of rain on January 10 this year for example, the site was half covered in water and was still, a month later, deep enough to come up to the chest of an adult Labrador dog. We have photos (on our Website) of the area completely covered with water flowing onto Fifield Road.

RBWM again commissioned their own Independent Consultant (WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff) to look at the revised SUDS Scheme and new Flood Risk Assessment (which was omitted from the earlier Application). Their report was placed on the RBWM Website on February 29th and it is as damning as the first report.

The Report supports many of the arguments OGAFCA has made about Flooding Issues in relation to this Application. In summary it says that the Revised SUDS Scheme and new Flood Risk Assessment are still deficient – and at the end lists 7 Issues still to be resolved. The

transmittal email from Stephen Riley (Associate Director of WSP) says “Regrettably the applicant still needs to provide more detail to adequately demonstrate their drainage proposals are viable”.

Finally, the Application shows no evidence that consultations have taken place with South East Water about the fact that a 1.2 metre Diameter and very high pressure Water Main installed in 2008 runs under the Western side of the Site. All Water Authorities have strict rules about developments near such infrastructure because of potential damage in the event of Pipeline failure. One of the proposed 1.5 metre deep Water Attenuation Pools is sited immediately above the Pipeline – which is only 1.2 metres below the Surface at that point.

Archaeology

Berkshire Archaeology say:-

“There are potential archaeological implications with this proposal as evidenced by Berkshire Archaeology’s Historic Environment Record (HER). The site is located on the fringes of the Middle Thames Valley, an area rich in prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman remains.

The site is within an area of archaeological potential, specifically relating to prehistoric and Roman remains. A programme of works is required to mitigate the impact of development and to record any surviving remains so as to advance our understanding of their significance in accordance with Paragraph 141 of the NPPF and local plan policy.

Therefore the application site falls within an area of archaeological significance and archaeological remains may be damaged by ground disturbance for the proposed new gym club and associated works.”

Ecology

An access will be built to the Site from the Fifield Road and this will require the removal of some trees. And there is potential for Root Damage along the Southern and Western Boundaries of the Site.

In addition, such a busy and active Site will adversely affect the local Flora and Fauna.

Sport England

Sport England say in their letter of 22 May 2015:-

“If Sport England had been aware of the application for the development of the Club’s existing site, then Sport England would have objected as paragraph 74 of the NPPF requires existing sports facilities to be protected from development or replaced.”

Sequential Test for alternative Sites

A Sequential Test for alternative locations was submitted with the original Application.

At the Bray Parish council Extraordinary Planning Committee Meeting on February 8, 2016 the Applicant was asked “Why has the Applicant not submitted an updated detailed sequential testing report that takes into account that the proposed building has been significantly reduced and therefore what evidence can the applicant provide to show how many sites were considered ...”

The Applicant’s reply was that the original Sequential Test was done based on the reduced size (and not the original size) so no additional Tests were required! Attendees present were more than surprised at the response.

Summary

We believe that the accumulation of all the issues above more than outweigh the Very Special Circumstances put forward by the Applicant and therefore ask that Planning Officers and Borough Councillors RECOMMEND REFUSAL of this Application.

It is evident from a huge amount of correspondence from local Residents that many do recognise that The Phoenix Gymnastics Club is a very popular facility and does great work. Their comments and those above are not against the Club and what it is delivering, but are about the inappropriate Site in the Green Belt which is subject to Flooding, high Traffic volumes and many other issues.

We therefore urge the current Landlord Farmglade and RBWM to work together to find a more suitable and appropriate location.

Yours sincerely,

Grenville Annetts
Chairman

Copies to:-

OGAFCA Committee Members

RBWM Council - Bray Ward Councillors - David Burbage, David Coppinger and Leo Walters

Bray Parish Council - Oakley Green and Fifield Ward Councillor - Nicola Marsh

Bray Parish Council - Oakley Green and Fifield Ward Councillor - Chris Yates

Bray Parish Council - Alexander Ward Councillor - Julie Glover

Bray Parish Council - Dedworth Ward Councillor - Michael Airey

Bray Parish Council - Parish Clerk – Susan Cook

Down Place Residents Association Chairman - David Short

Oakley Green and Fifield Residents Association Chairman - Rod Ball

Tarbay Lane Residents Association Chairman - Martyn Kilmister

Oakley Green, Fifield and District Community Association Limited by Guarantee.

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