

Oakley Green, Fifield & District Community Association



August 7, 2015

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.

The Phoenix Gymnastics Club is very popular facility and does great work. As a measure of its increasing popularity, the Club has a Membership of over 750 and plans to expand. Some local Residents use the Facility and see it as an Asset to the area. The comments below are not against the Club and what it is delivering, but describe the concerns local Residents have about re-locating it from a Brown Field Site to a Green Field Site in Fifield and the associated adverse impacts of such a move.

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 Proposal constitutes an inappropriate form of 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 there is a case of very special circumstances (VSC) that would clearly overcome this harm.

The Application says 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.

Neighbours

The proposed development is located immediately to the North of 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.

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 due to impacts from Vehicular Traffic, Noise and Light Pollution.

Scale

The Gymnasium itself is huge – rising to 14.16 metres, which will interfere with the Visual Amenity of the area. The Application Form says the area of the Gym is 1662 Square Metres – but the detailed Plans show the Gym has dimensions of 48.05 x 35.20 Metres = 1692 square metres.

The whole Site will be about 1.86 hectares and will dwarf all other Buildings nearby, including the Nursing Home next door.

Road Traffic and Safety

The Gym Club currently has about 750 Members and about 300 additional casual users. With a newer, larger and more up to date facility – these numbers are likely to increase over time. Parking provision has been made for 141 Cars and some Coaches.

The Traffic Report suggests that Congestion will not be a problem – but the associated Traffic movements will be in addition to current Traffic which already uses the busy Fifield Road. Either end of the Fifield Road - onto the A308 to the North and the Junction at the Memorial Hall Crossroads to the South - are very congested at peak times in the morning and early evening. Also what the Report fails to acknowledge is that Traffic movements will be bunched at Class Starting and Ending Times and not be smoothed out over the Operating Hours.

The Traffic Report also fails to acknowledge the fact that the Fifield Road is heavily used by Horses, Riders and Handlers - many Children - from Wayside Stables which is just a couple of hundred metres along the road and a large number of daily Dog Walkers.

Added to this, the Fifield Road has a tight bend immediately to the South by the Entrance to the Nursing Home and this has been the scene of Accidents in the past.

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.

The Fifield Road has a 7.5 Tonne Weight Limit – which would preclude most Coaches from visiting the Site.

Flooding

In their Letter, Summerleaze the Owners of the Field say the area is a “barren area containing clay only” which contradicts Statements made elsewhere in the Application about being on draining sand and gravel beds.

The RBWM Drainage Officer in his report agrees and says:-

“The brief Sustainable Drainage Statement provided on behalf of the applicant states that the proposed site is set on underlying sands and gravels and as such is free draining land suitable for a SuDS scheme. The geological map would however suggest that the underlying geology is London Clay with no superficial deposits.

The Sustainable Drainage Statement also states that the site is surrounded by deep, free running ditches, which dry up during the summer indicating that they have ample capacity for further surface water runoff if necessary. The ditch running parallel with Fifield Road is however known to respond rapidly to rainfall and flooding has been experienced on the ditch network, both upstream and downstream of the proposed development.”

Local Residents are very concerned about the potential to make flooding worse because of the huge amounts of Water Run Off from the Gymnasium Roof and Car Park.

Noise and Light Pollution

The Site will undoubtedly have external lighting – especially in the Car Park in the Winter months when the Gym will operate up to 9:00 pm Monday to Friday and up to 6:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday.

The Transport Report says the Worst Case is 1246 Movements per day during the week – but this number is based on current membership levels. This will result in significant additional Light and Air Pollution.

All this will particularly impact the elderly Residents of Longlea Care Home next door and the Northern side of Fifield Village.

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.

Other

Finally, 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.”

Given all these points, we do not believe the case has been made that Very Special Circumstances (VSC) exist that clearly overcome all the harm from such a large Development in this Rural Green Belt location.

We therefore ask that you refuse this Application and that RBWM put lots of effort into assisting the Phoenix Gym Club to find a more 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 - Janice Eden-Bagley

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.

Registered Company Number: 07175596.

Registered Office: Fifield Farm Cottage, Oakley Green Road, Oakley Green, Windsor, Berkshire. SL4 4QF.

Website: www.ogafcap.co.uk