

WOOLLAM PARK 5/2024/2271

## Applicants' Note in respect of playing pitch provision

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October 2025

1. This Note has been prepared to further explain the applicant's intentions as regards playing pitch provision.
2. Various of Policy B1's criteria refer to sports pitches.
3. Criterion 2 seeks the provision of an all-weather pitch available for community use at the primary school.
4. Criterion 4 concerns the replacement of existing playing fields.
5. Criterion 5 refers to sports provision to meet the additional needs generated by the development; this could be provided on site or off-site with suitable justification.
6. There is inevitable some degree of overlap with criteria 2 and 5.
7. The proposed development includes land for a primary school which would include a playing pitch; there is no impediment to the principle of an all-weather pitch if that is deemed appropriate in that location and subject to agreement with Hertfordshire County Council who intend to take the primary school land and a financial contribution. The applicant is mindful that the community use agreement would need to be entered into by HCC and this is beyond the applicant's control. Subject to these qualifications, criterion 2 can be met.<sup>1</sup>
8. The proposed development includes the replacement of the existing playing pitches. Criterion 4 is met.
9. Allowing for the age/care restricted accommodation that is proposed (which is unlikely to generate a playing field requirement) the Sport England Playing Pitch calculator suggests the following number of pitches are required: adult football 0.56; youth football 1.6; and mini soccer 1.29.<sup>2</sup> Even with the higher applicable resident population the space requirements do not justify an adult football pitch. That said, a whole adult pitch would need to be provided (or two youth pitches).

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<sup>1</sup>We are mindful however that Sport England appear to refer to improvements to such existing facilities elsewhere in St Albans.

<sup>2</sup>The version of the playing pitch calculator prepared by the LPA does not allow for the age/care restricted accommodation.

10. The proposed development does not provide any further playing pitches fields. This was known to the LPA throughout the pre-application process and the principle of financial contributions towards off-site improvements to the existing recreation facilities at Toulmin Drive was discussed at that time. Pending comments from Sport England, the LPA were content with that approach. The LPA has referred to undertaking a feasibility study in respect of improvements to Toulmin Drive but we understand that has not in fact been commissioned
11. The LPA will be aware of the importance of making both an efficient use of land and the optimum use of the potential of each site. The applicant has long indicated that to provide on-site playing pitches would compromise the ability to achieve the housing component directed to North St Albans whilst respecting other legitimate development considerations and objectives.
12. The site's topography, shown on various drawings (including Figure 42 of the DAS), is such that to achieve the acceptable gradient for a playing pitch(s), with their associated spectator and ball-spill areas, would require considerable additional earthworks to create an appropriate plateau.
13. The gentlest gradients are in the north-east corner of the site, but even then, the land take required to accommodate the playing field, associated infrastructure including parking and changing facilities and the reconfiguration of routes within that development block, would at least half the amount of development that could be provided in that part of the development. This would have a material effect on ability to achieve the overall site capacity.<sup>3</sup>
14. Sport England commented on the application on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025. They comment in the following terms:
  - (1) The application proposes that contributions for meeting natural turf football pitch needs be directed to the Toulmin Drive Recreation Ground.
  - (2) Toulmin Drive Recreation Ground is a strategic site for adult football.
  - (3) The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy recommends improving the quality of the pitches and the ancillary pavilion provision at Toulmin Drive Recreation Ground.
  - (4) Additional rugby union and cricket pitch needs could be met by the proposals in the planning application for the replacement playing field facilities.
15. They go on to state that the principle of this approach is satisfactory in their view. Indeed they state: "*a financial contribution....towards improvements to the pitches and pavilion facilities at nearby Toulmin Drive Recreation Ground would be appropriate as this is a strategically important site for community football in St Albans which requires significant investment to address deficiencies which could improve both the capacity and quality of the facilities on the site*".

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<sup>3</sup>We have excluded the central common area because of its multifunctional green infrastructure function which would similarly be compromised and in turn would then comprise development parcels.

16. Regardless of whether it is or isn't possible to provide a playing pitch at Woollam Park, there is clearly a material benefit and greater utility in improving the Toulmin Drive facilities rather than providing an additional pitch as part of the development.
17. Delivering a standalone facility at Woollam Park is not considered an appropriate way to meet new sports provision needs:
  - (1) It would be isolated from existing community infrastructure, limiting its accessibility and integration.
  - (2) It would lack the scale and strategic value of Toulmin Drive, which is already identified as a key site in the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy.
  - (3) Investment in Woollam Park would risk fragmenting provision, whereas enhancing Toulmin Drive would consolidate and improve existing assets for broader community benefit.
18. The development which has been granted at Sewell Park, part of the North St Albans Broad Location, obliged to make a financial contribution towards improvements at William Bird Pavillion which is associated with Toulmin Drive Recreation Ground. There is plainly a synergy in further investment in this manner.

**Owen Jones**  
**15<sup>th</sup> October 2025**