

The Application is for full planning permission for an extension of the existing academy building, erection of a building enclosing an indoor football pitch, the formation of four floodlit synthetic pitches, demountable spectator stands, running track, salt saturator tank, associated floodlighting, landscaping and external works.

The application is a cross-boundary application with Stoke City Council. The larger part of the application site is within the City Council's area and that includes the indoor football pitch and floodlit synthetic pitches.

The Planning Committee at its meeting on 19 June:

- (a) deferred its decision on the application before the Borough Council, to enable Members to visit the site and view those proposals in the context of their surroundings;
- (b) determined what comments were to be passed to the City Council for them to consider when they determine their part of the application.

Accordingly this report now focuses purely on those elements of the proposal that are within the Borough.

The proposed developments within the Borough would involve the extension of the existing academy building. The extension would extend the length of the building by 20.5m with the same width. The existing balcony area would also be built above with a new canopy formed above the extension. Four new floodlighting columns are also proposed to create a goalkeeper training area and junior practice area (2 on each). Two demountable spectator stands are also proposed adjacent to one of the academy pitches. These would be lightweight aluminium framed canvas structures - 12m wide by 3.9m deep and 3.8m high. A salt saturator tank with a maximum height of 3.3m and diameter of 2.4m is also proposed adjacent to the existing ancillary structures. This would be surrounded by a "living wall". A 54m 3 lane sprint track would also be proposed adjacent to the existing academy building and the drainage of the existing overspill car park would be improved and a reinforced grass system surface provided.

That part of the application site which is within the Borough lies within the Green Belt as well as an Area of Landscape Maintenance as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

Vehicular access to the site from the Strategic Highway Network (A34) is obtained via residential estate roads Riverside Road and Rose Tree Avenue.

The 13 week period for the determination of this application expires on 26 July 2012.

If the Borough Council are minded to approve the proposals they will need to be notified to the Secretary of State under the Consultation Direction.

Recommendation With Respect to the Application Before the Borough Council

(a) That the Council should notify the Secretary of State that it is minded to grant planning permission subject to conditions relating to the following matters:

- (i) Commencement of development.**
- (ii) Approved plans.**
- (iii) Prior approval of materials.**
- (iv) Prior approval of holistic landscaping scheme (including management plan and living wall).**
- (v) Prior approval of tree protection measures.**
- (vi) Unexpected contamination.**
- (vii) Importation of top soil.**
- (viii) Lighting in accordance with submitted details and maintained as such.**
- (ix) Hours of operation limited to 9:30pm.**

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| (x) | Construction method statement – highway issues. |
| (xi) | No direct light source upon the highway. |
| (xii) | Development in accordance with Flood Risk Assessment. |
| (xiii) | Development in accordance with Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy. |
| (xiv) | Prior approval of a surface water drainage scheme. |
| (xv) | Grampian (negative) condition relating to lighting improvements of access from Rose Tree Avenue. |
| (xvi) | Drainage Plan including any additional appropriate condition to address the concerns of the Highways Agency. |
| (b) | That should the Secretary of State not call the application in, that the application be approved subject to the above conditions. |

Reason for Recommendation

Although elements of the proposal within the Borough constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt, very special circumstances have been demonstrated by the applicant to outweigh the harm of the development within this locality. Those circumstances include the Club's requirement to comply with the changing requirements of the Football Association (FA) contained within the Elite Performance Player Plan (EPPP) including the requirement for all facilities to be on one site and to meet essential criteria for Category 1 status, and the limited additional built development on the total site area which would have a relatively limited impact upon openness.. The proposal therefore adheres with aims and objectives of the NPPF as well as those relevant development plan policies indicated below.

Policies and Proposals in the Approved Development Plan Relevant to the Decision on the "Borough" Section of the Proposal:-

West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy 2008 (WMRSS)

Policy QE4: Greenery, Urban Greenspace and Public Spaces
 Policy T2: Reducing the need to travel
 Policy T4: Promoting travel awareness

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan (SSSP) 1996 - 2011

Policy D1: Sustainable forms of Development
 Policy D2: The design and environmental quality of development
 Policy D4: Managing change in rural areas
 Policy D5B: Development in the Green Belt
 Policy T1A: Sustainable Location
 Policy T1B: An Integrated Transport Strategy
 Policy T18A: Transport and Development
 Policy T12: Strategic Highway Network
 Policy T13: Local Roads
 Policy NC1: Protection of the Countryside: General Considerations
 Policy NC2: Landscape Protection and Restoration
 Policy NC13: Protection of Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) 2006-2026 (adopted 2009)

Policy SP3: Spatial Principles of Movement and Access
 Policy ASP5: Newcastle and Kidsgrove Urban Neighbourhoods Area Spatial Policy
 Policy ASP6: Rural Area Spatial Policy
 Policy CSP1: Design Quality
 Policy CSP3: Sustainability and Climate Change
 Policy CSP4: Natural Assets
 Policy CSP5: Open Space/Sport/Recreation

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy S3:	Development in the Green Belt
Policy N2:	Development and Nature conservation – site surveys
Policy N12:	Development and the Protection of Trees
Policy N17:	Landscape Character – General Considerations
Policy N19:	Landscape Maintenance Areas
Policy T16:	Development – General Parking Requirements

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2012) (NPPF)

Circular 11/95 The use of conditions in planning permissions

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Urban Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Stadia, Football Academies and Centres of Excellence – Sport England Planning Bulletin (2003)

Planning for Landscape Change – Supplementary Planning Guidance to the SSSP (Staffordshire County Council)

The Secretary of State's Announcement of His Intention to Abolish RSS

The Secretary of State has made it clear that it is the Government's intention to revoke RSSs and the Localism Act 2011, which includes powers to give effect to that intention, received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. However, pending the making of a revocation order in accordance with the new Act, the RSS remains part of the statutory development plan. Nevertheless, the intention to revoke the RSS and the enactment are material considerations.

Relevant Planning History (with Respect to the Land Within the Borough)

There have been numerous applications over the years showing the development of this site.

2000	00/207/FUL	Permit - reconstruction and upgrading of existing football pitches, resurfacing and irrigation tank and pumphouse
2002	02/00170/FUL	Permit - installation of irrigation tank and pump house
2007	07/00500/FUL	Erection of 3 temporary (2 years) portacabins to be used for academy training facilities – granted consent until 31 July 2009
2007	07/00664/FUL	Temporary stoned car park – granted consent until 31 July 2009
2009	09/00112/FUL	Permit - development of Stoke City Football Club Academy Sports Pavilion including grounds maintenance and pitch equipment store, ancillary utilities structures, perimeter fencing and associated car parking
2009	09/00227/FUL	Permit - development of floodlight synthetic pitch and floodlighting to existing Football Academy match pitch
2010	10/00769/FUL	Permit - installation of automatic irrigation system including erection of water storage tank, pump house and associated works -

Views of Consultees

City Council - Archaeology has no objections to the proposal.

City Council - Design & Conservation - these comments relate specifically to those aspects within Stoke and the main comments are summarised below:-

- The selected location for the indoor building is well reasoned as the site is screened from view by level changes and mature vegetation
- The particular issue that needs to be addressed is the height of the indoor pitch and expanse of the roof pitch as the excessive height of the building will make the roof visible from the more elevated position of the A500.
- It is important that the new building does not impair the visual quality of the setting of the linear pavilion.
- The mature landscape setting surrounding the site also needs to be retained so as to retain the openness of the Green Belt.
- The siting of the building screens much of the building from view for properties on Northwood Lane.
- The architectural expression of the building results in a single mass that is broken up into smaller pieces reducing the visual impact upon approach.
- The use of natural materials will help it blend into the environment and have a recessive approach.
- The selection of a grey roof will help it reduce glare and blend in with the skyline.
- More details required on hardworks and although softworks can be conditioned a plan would be useful.

City Council Ecologist specifies the following recommendations:-

- Results of surveys of ponds for great crested newts and details of any mitigation measures to be submitted to the LPA prior to any decision being made on the application.
- Information to be submitted on trees to be pruned as part of the scheme and their likelihood to support bat roosts prior to any decision being made on the application.
- The proposed swales to the south of the indoor pitch should be re-designed to be more naturalistic and provide more opportunities for bio-diversity enhancement.
- Detailed landscaping scheme condition.
- Condition relating to incorporation of nesting opportunities for birds.

Staffordshire County Council Ecologist specifies that she is happy to leave this to her colleague at the County Council to deal with.

Environment Agency - no objection to the proposal subject to conditions relating to the following:-

- Development in accordance with submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA).
- Development in accordance with drainage strategy.
- Prior approval of a surface water drainage scheme.

Informatives on Groundwater Protection and Foul Drainage are also requested.

City Council - Regulatory Services have no objections regarding contaminated land.

The **Borough's Environmental Health Division** have no objections to the proposals subject to conditions relating to the following:-

- Hours of Construction.
- Implementation and maintenance of submitted lighting scheme.
- Unexpected contamination.
- Importation of topsoil.

City Council - Highways – Due to the number of vehicle movements to and from the site reducing as a result of the proposal there are no objections on highway grounds subject to the inclusion of conditions relating to the following:-

- Travel Plan (detailed).
- Prior approval of cycle parking adjacent to entrances for security.
- Potential street lighting from Rose Tree Avenue to the site.

A comment is also made in relation to a public right of way on part of the site within the Stoke.

“The application proposes to enclose footpath 139 between two high wire fences and so create a tunnel effect with no means of exit. This could be shortened by not fencing the proposed planting area”

Staffordshire County Council Highways have no objections to the proposal subject to a condition specifying that no direct light source from floodlighting shall be visible to drivers on the highway.

Highways Agency – have issued a Direction that planning permission should not be granted at present – in order to allow the applicant’s time to provide further details regarding drainage, geotechnical information and boundary fencing, the Agency considering that insufficient information has been provided to enable a full assessment of the development to be undertaken and to ensure that the A500 continues to serve its purpose. The Agency have since confirmed that the Direction relates only to those proposals within the City Council’s area (and they expect, following the receipt of additional information, to be in a position soon to lift the Direction).

Natural England has no objections to the proposal in relation to protected landscape but does make reference to potential impacts upon protected species and referencing their standing advice. They have applied the principles of their own advice to European protected species and state that further information on bats and great crested newts should be provided or the application should be refused.

City Council - Planning Policy has no overriding issues in relation to the principle of the proposal.

Severn Trent Water has no objection to the proposal subject to the inclusion of a condition relating to drainage plans for the disposal of surface water and foul sewage.

Sport England although they raise some queries principally for the City Council to consider, they indicated that have no statutory objection to the application as it accords with exception E2 of their policy set out in ‘Playing Fields Policy – A Sporting Future for the Playing Fields of England’ however this is subject to the following:-

- Securing access rights for St Joseph’s School to their remote playing field.
- Re-considering the inclusion of the 5 a side pitches.
- Taking account of the design recommendations of the Football Association.
- Securing some community/club use of the sports pitches and facilities.

City Council - Trees Officer – The tree survey identifies that the trees to be removed are category B trees which should ordinarily be kept in a development however it is accepted that there is little scope to move or reduce the proposal. The proposed tree planting to the rear of the existing car park to assist in breaking up views from the A500 should be on a minimum replacement of a one for one to mitigate the loss. Conditions relating to the following are also considered paramount:-

- Tree Protection Measures.
- Works schedule for trees and hedgerow.
- Method statements and an arboricultural method statement.
- Landscaping scheme.

The **Borough’s Landscape Development Section** has no objections to the proposals in the Borough subject to the inclusion of conditions relating to:-

- Tree Protection.
- Appropriate landscaping condition to cover all areas of the development including proposals for hedgerow management.

The following concerns were raised in relation to the land within the City Council’s area on the matter of the impact on retained trees of:-

- The construction of the access road.
- The proposed footpath.
- The use of the access road during the on-site operations.
- The proximity of the proposed building to several trees along the Western woodland.

Suggestions were made in relation to realignment of the access road and footpath or additional information supplied to demonstrate the proposals are in accordance with British Standards.

The **Urban Vision Design Review Panel** provided comments during the course of the pre-application discussions and their comments can be summarised as follows:-

- The Panel thought that the proposed pavilion extension being of the same design and materials as the existing building was entirely appropriate and would not raise any design issues for this freestanding structure. The enclosure of any new building services within the building envelope rather than let them project above the roof line was to be supported.
- The Panel was more concerned about the design of the proposed indoor pitch building. This is envisaged as a permanent facility, but has the appearance, structure and materials of a temporary facility. What is proposed would be essentially a system building clad in white fabric, the cheapest way of enclosing a space, which will be visually quite prominent. The proposed building would be very close to the A500 and, despite the tree screen and its low lying position, would be clearly visible from the main road, particularly at night if it is illuminated from inside during winter and evening use. The opportunity should be taken to reconsider the design of the indoor pitch building taking a different approach to its overall form, and seeking to integrate the ancillary facilities (changing rooms, treatment room, viewing areas, etc.) with the overall structure and not provide these as an add-on to a system building.
- The Panel appreciated the landscape quality of the site and its setting, and were pleased to hear that a landscape architect had been appointed. However, there are certain landscape elements of the existing site which will need to be addressed in the future. Leylandii hedges have been installed along certain boundaries and the Panel considered that these would be likely to cause problems in the future – both in terms of maintenance and by acting as an attractor for roosting starlings, which may have an adverse effect on the high value cars parked nearby.
- In extending and improving the car parking the Panel thought that a more naturalistic approach should be taken to providing new trees within these areas, putting the cars in a park, rather than just providing a car park.
- At present the training ground is a largely open space which is perhaps sometimes windswept and not very legible. As part of the overall landscape design consideration should be given to introducing hedgerows between the formal pitches, particularly where these may have existed in previous times, to help define the various spaces, make the site more navigable and support biodiversity.
- A final consideration for the landscape master plan is the provision of ground source heating. As the development will involve the disturbance of an extensive surface area, for example in the provision of five-a-side pitches in front of the indoor pitch, the opportunity should be taken to install ground source heating to make the indoor pitch building more sustainable.

The **County Council as the Minerals Planning Authority** have confirmed that there is no issue of mineral sterilization insofar as the Borough's part of the application is concerned.

Campaign to Protect Rural England, City Council - City & Town Centres Regeneration Manager, Disabled Access Committee, City Council - Economic Development, Culture & Sport, Staffordshire County Council Public Rights of Way Unit, the Police, City Council - Sports Development, Ramblers Association, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Stafford Borough Council - No comments received by the due date so it must be assumed that they have no comments to make.

Comments relating specifically to elements within the City Council's area will not be considered in this report as these will be considered by the City Council.

Representations

Eleven letters of objection have been received and their comments are summarised below:-

- Traffic Issues (Access/Parking/Traffic Movement/Pedestrian Safety) relating to access from the site along Riverside Road, Rose Tree Avenue and Greenwood Avenue.
- Access issues along the approach road adjacent to the existing academy due to the limited width and volume/type of traffic.

- Conflict between the vehicles for the proposal and the public footpath – already issues in relation to this.
- Residential Amenity issues (Light/Noise Pollution) for residents of Riverside Road and Lymewood Place from additional floodlighting, additional pitches and spectator stands.
- Issues from construction and traffic movements on the road – potholes already present and damage to drains (collapsing).
- Policy issue of its location within the Green Belt and overdevelopment.
- More suitable brownfield sites.
- Underused training pitches in this location – are more needed?
- Light pollution will distract drivers on the A500.
- Poor choice of material colour for the indoor pitch should it be allowed – a more recessive green colour should be utilised.
- Damage done to trees along the approach road due to the narrow width and size of vehicles using it.

A petition from local residents opposed to the development with 121 signatories has been received. The following points are made:-

- Road traffic will increase not decrease as claimed by the Football Club. That the introduction of spectator stands to seat 174 people together with available car parking means that onsite capacity of people and cars is greatly underestimated in the Transport Statement. A new response by the planning authority with a view to decreasing damage to local infrastructure, noise pollution and traffic congestion should be provided.
- The effect of the extra floodlighting capacity proposed should be further investigated by the planning authority with a view to decreasing light pollution upon neighbouring houses from its present level.
- The planning application (does not) conform to the National Planning Policy Framework because it destroys Green Belt land.
- A combined round of public consultation should now be undertaken by the relevant planning authorities so that any conditions can be debated in public.

Comments relating specifically to elements within the City Council area will not be considered in this report as these will be considered by the City Council.

Applicant/Agent's Submission

The following documents were also submitted to accompany the application:

Design & Access Statement

This document provides a comprehensive analysis of the proposals and how they were decided upon, taking into account the club's requirements as well as the specifics of the location taking on board comments received during the pre-application process. Due to the nature and scale of the proposals much of the focus is on the proposed indoor pitch. This document also includes reference and response to the Urban Vision Design Review Panel with the scheme taken to the Panel during the pre-application process.

Planning Statement

This provides a robust justification of the club's need to provide these 'essential' facilities to meet the requirements of the Football Association's Elite Performance Player Plan that was recently voted through by the Football League and is supported by the Premier League. The document details the history of the site as well as the changes to the academy system that has resulted in the inception of the Elite Performance Player Plan (EPPP). A review of the proposals is then put forward on the basis that it is appropriate development in the Green Belt however a case of very special circumstances is also included should the planning authority feel otherwise. Consideration of other factors relating to the proposals are also discussed.

Transport Statement

The Transport Statement concludes that the only change in vehicle movements associated with the proposals would be a reduction in trips associated with coaches transferring scholars to and from alternative sites. This will result in a reduction in significant mileage which will also reduce emissions.

Travel Plan

A Travel Plan is also submitted - to improve the use of sustainable transport methods

Statement of Community Engagement

This discusses the method of consultation and collates views that were expressed to the club, agents and architects. It also tries to quantify the number of households and residents who engaged with the process and the number who provided comments.

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

This report recommends that further surveys be undertaken and these are currently being produced.

Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy

This report concludes that the site is within Flood Zone 1 on the Environment Agency Flood Maps and is outside the 1% plus climate change flood outline of the site specific hydraulic modelling which indicates the site has a low risk of flooding. A sustainable urban drainage strategy has been proposed for the development mimicking the existing condition consisting of an infiltration system into the granular soils and or swales to the southern boundary where soakaways alone are insufficient due to poor infiltration rates or other site constraints. This is equivalent to the existing conditions at the site.

The applicant's agents have submitted a response to the petition. With respect to the issue of **traffic levels** they reiterate that the Transport Statement robustly demonstrates that there would be a reduction in local road traffic/movements as a result of the proposal, concluding that 64 vehicular movements per week would be saved. The Highway Authority itself has concluded that the proposal should result in a reduction in the number of vehicle trips to and from the site. With respect to the spectator stands these are to accommodate existing spectators who currently stand at pitchside – this is an improvement of an existing activity not the introduction of a new one. The proposal involves no increase in car parking. With respect to the issue of **floodlighting** the proposed floodlights are a minimum 20 metres further away from the rear of residential properties than the existing ones. There have to their knowledge been no complaints about floodlighting from local residents to either of the Environmental Health Authorities since the existing lights were installed in Summer 2010, and the proposed lighting would be of the highest standard and its impact will be consistent with that shown on the submitted lighting scheme and therefore acceptable. With respect to the suggested **fresh public consultation** the agent submits that this is neither required nor justified.

All of these documents are available for inspection at the Guildhall and on www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk.

Key Issues

The application is for full planning permission for an extension of the existing academy building, erection of a building enclosing an indoor football pitch, the formation of four floodlit synthetic pitches, demountable spectator stands, running track, salt saturator tank, associated floodlighting, landscaping and external works.

The application is a cross-boundary application with Stoke City Council. The larger part of the application site is within the City Council's area and that includes the indoor football pitch and floodlit synthetic pitches. Each Council can only determine the proposal within their own administrative area.

This report focuses solely upon the proposal before the Borough Council.

Details of the proposals have been provided in the introduction to the report.

Procedural issue

Before moving to the substance of the application, members will have noted that the petitioners request that a decision on the application is deferred to allow for a further period of public consultation. The decision has already been deferred once to enable Members to visit the site on 5 July.

Whilst the decision on whether to defer coming to a view on the application to enable further public consultation on potential conditions is for the Committee to make, the required publicity as set out in legislation has been undertaken by the Authorities, pre-application consultation was undertaken by the applicant, the application is able to now be determined by the Councils (subject to notification to the Secretary of State), and your Officer does not consider there to be any substantive reason for such a deferral at least insofar as the Borough Council is concerned. Members are reminded that in the event of a failure to determine an application within the statutory period the Council would have to be able to explain the delay satisfactorily and why the application could not have been determined favourably within that period.

Policy background

That part of the application site which is within the Borough lies within the Green Belt as well as an Area of Landscape Maintenance as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

It has been determined to date by the Borough Council that the academy developments on this site including the building itself, and other built features constituted inappropriate development in Green Belt policy terms, whilst the floodlighting and synthetic pitches did not. The recently issued NPPF refers to the provision of buildings with the purpose of providing appropriate facilities for outdoor sport as “appropriate development”, so long as they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The previous guidance (PPG2) referred only to “essential” facilities and defined these tightly whilst the phrase “appropriate facilities” is not so defined. The NPPF also refers to the extension of any building (and not just dwellings as was previously the case) as appropriate in Green Belt policy terms provided such extension does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Developments other than buildings are to be determined as appropriate or not on whether they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

The academy building exists and that must be the starting point. No specific guidance exists either within the NPPF or within the Development Plan as to what might be considered to be a disproportionate addition, but in floorspace terms this is quite a significant extension (in footprint terms of the order of 44%) and one which is accordingly considered disproportionate. In terms of the outdoor sport exception your Officer submits that the proposals here by reason of their scale and nature (the academy building includes significant office accommodation and there is now a link proposed to indoor not outdoor sport) and in all cases their undoubted impact, particularly when viewed cumulatively, upon the openness of the Green Belt and conflict with that purpose of including land within the Green Belt which refers to the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment, go significantly beyond what is being considered as “appropriate development” in Green Belt terms in the NPPF. Accordingly this report starts from the premise that the proposals here being considered constitute inappropriate development, with the exception of the floodlighting

The remaining key issues for consideration in the determination of this application are considered to be:-

- Is the impact of the proposal upon the surrounding landscape and countryside unacceptable?
- Would the development cause material harm to the interests of residential amenity?
- Would the development have significant adverse impacts on highway safety?
- Would the development either increase flood risk or be at risk itself?
- Are there any other matters which need to be addressed by the Borough Council?
- Do the required very special circumstances exist to justify approval for inappropriate development within the Green Belt?

Is the impact of the proposal upon the surrounding landscape and countryside unacceptable?

The general planning policies controlling development in the countryside apply with equal force in Green Belts. SSSP policy D4 refers inter alia to the objective of seeking to protect open countryside for its own sake, as does Policy NC1. New building in the countryside is to be strictly controlled and any development which is acceptable in principle should respect the character of the countryside and maintain or improve the environment. SSSP Policy NC1 and NLP Policy N17 set out a number of criteria to be considered in assessing the landscape impact of a development, whilst the Planning for Landscape Change SPG provides further guidance.

The application site and Michelin Sports Club site lies at the foot of that part of the Lyme Valley where the presence of built development on both sides of the valley becomes less noticeable, with the wooded slopes

up to Clayton hiding that part of the urban area from view although the back of the Trent Vale housing is an ever present feature. The site is just to the north of the A500 raised embankment which visually truncates the valley.

The existing academy or pavilion building was designed by architects well known in this field and they are once again involved in the current proposal. The building, although by no means insignificant in scale, was designed and positioned in such a manner so that it would have the least obtrusive impact upon its surroundings. The original scheme was deemed to be well considered and indeed has since been commended on its design.

The current proposal looks to extend the academy building by simply lengthening or extruding it and replicating the same design features. At present it could be considered to comprise three distinctive but fairly equally balanced elements, and in the proposals one of these becomes a longer and much more dominant feature. Nevertheless it is to be noted that the Urban Vision Design Review Panel see no difficulty at all with the design of the proposed extension and are of the view that the extension is "entirely appropriate" in design terms.

In terms of the wider design principles the same considerations apply as before. The North-South axis that the building is built upon is felt to be the most respectful in terms of the surrounding landscape and main views into the site taking into account public footpaths and the surrounding topography. Although the building extends further into the open space, this would still be seen within the backdrop of the larger Michelin building.

The salt saturator – a 2.4 m diameter tank proposed adjacent to the existing ancillary structures is not felt to be a significant development itself and the club are proposing as part of the scheme to include what is termed a living wall feature to screen this element and other existing pieces of plant. Although a more natural area of landscaping would have been preferable to achieve this, it is accepted that the site is somewhat constrained in comparison to other facilities of this type and this would have taken up valuable space within the site which is not apparently a viable option. The overall effect of this would be to have a positive gain upon the surrounding landscape shielding the existing as well as the proposed structures from view.

In terms of the external materials to be used on the Academy building, these were felt to be a well chosen palette as part of the initial scheme and provide a high quality finish to the building whilst not appearing as a stark feature within the surrounding landscape. The proposed extension intends to match these materials however design elements have been incorporated such as window breaks to respect the fact that material batches may be slightly different than when the original was constructed two years ago. A condition could control this.

In terms of the additional floodlighting columns proposed as part of this scheme, the report on application 09/227/FUL that dealt with floodlighting at the site advised as follows:-

"The proposed floodlights are specialist sports models that have been designed where light pollution control is an essential requirement and include several features such as anti-glare internal baffles and in-built line of sight aiming features to help achieve this. The applicant has stated that the proposed lighting level over the playing pitch surfaces will be in the order of 300 lux in line with levels recommended by Sport England for external football use. The applicant has detailed within their design and access statement and visual impact assessment that the design of the lighting is such that the luminance is focused totally on the playing surface with no measurable overspill much beyond 5 metres back from the touchlines. The case officer has viewed similar floodlights in use at Everton Football Club and as can be seen in the photographs submitted as part of the visual impact assessment, the lights are well focused on to the pitch with minimal light spillage beyond this. This is demonstrated on a lighting plan submitted by Abacus as part of the application, this shows contours at 5m intervals with lux levels diminishing from 50 - 2 lux. Information obtained from the internet highlights that moonlight represents approximately 1 lux and lighting within a house is typically around 50 lux. As lighting intensity is related to the focus of light, the development would therefore have no significant impact much beyond the floodlit pitches due to the intensity of the light and the fact that it is light spillage and not a focused light source. It must also be noted that the proposed application site is not a deep countryside location given its position on the edge of an urban area. The elevated A500 which runs to the south of the application site is well lit to modern standards and there are residential developments located in more elevated locations than the application site to the north-east, north west and west of the application site that will already provide an element of light pollution within the surrounding landscape. In this context, the proposed development would not have a detrimental impact upon the Green Belt or surrounding landscape.

The proposed floodlights would also have no adverse impact during the day when not in use. Although they would be 15m in height, the proposed columns are relatively slimline and they are designed with a galvanised silver grey finish that will blend into the average typical British sky. When viewed from a distance they would therefore not dominate or appear visually intrusive within the surrounding landscape"

In terms of the 4 additional floodlights now proposed the same design principles apply as above and it should be noted that two of the columns would be located in between the two existing floodlit pitches. These two floodlights would have no greater impact than the existing ones and due to the specialist nature of the models to be used the further light pollution upon the surrounding countryside would be negligible.

Two further columns would be located beyond the extent of the existing lit area and thus encroach further into the unlit area away from the A500. When viewed within the wider context of the site, the additional floodlit area would not be readily noticeable and would not therefore have an adverse impact.

Due to the modest scale and nature of the proposed demountable spectator stands and their location within the context of the wider surroundings, (in between the academy building and the large Michelin building which is also at a higher level) it is not felt that these would have a detrimental impact upon the landscape subject to strict control over the colour of material to be used in covering them. This aspect could be controlled by condition.

In terms of the proposed sprint track and the re-surfacing of the overspill car park these would not have a great deal of impact upon the surrounding countryside. Due to the nature of the running track the ground would remain open and from certain views the material of the running track may appear like a footpath which is not a major feature within the context of the site and the wider surroundings. The reinforced grass system to be utilised for the overspill car park would definitely have a beneficial impact upon the surrounding landscape within the immediate vicinity however this would not be a readily noticeable feature within the wider landscape.

Would the development cause material harm to the interests of residential amenity?

This issue was looked at in detail for the previous application for floodlighting (09/227/FUL) with the report stating as follows: -

"The application site is currently utilised as playing fields and this application would not alter its use. The intensity of the use of the site and traffic flow from the site would therefore materially increase as a result of these proposals at certain times of the year due to the floodlights allowing use when lack of daylight would not otherwise allow such use. A noise impact assessment has been done on the proposals through a combination of background noise studies at certain times in different locations as well as noise prediction modelling techniques. The results of these have been considered by the Environmental Health Division and it is considered that subject to the use of the floodlights being limited to 9:30pm there would be no adverse impact upon the residential amenity of properties in the vicinity. It is reasonable to assume that this is an appropriate period and reflects the period of time they could reasonably use the playing surface in the summer months when hours of daylight are longer.

The proposed floodlighting would not have an adverse impact upon the residential amenity of any neighbouring properties. The nearest floodlights would be approximately 130m from residential dwellings and a light spillage diagram has shown that this would not reach anywhere near any of the rear gardens of these properties. Although the light source of the floodlights would be visible from these properties, it is felt that due to the separation distances discussed above, the operating hours specified by the applicant and the fact that the times when the floodlights are likely to be used is when one would expect curtains to be closed at these properties this would not adversely impact upon their amenity"

The additional four proposed floodlights would be about the same distance from the nearest residential dwellings as is the existing floodlighting and it is therefore considered that this element would not have an adverse impact upon the amenity of the occupiers of these properties.

Concerns have been raised that the inclusion of the spectator stands would increase the amount of people on the site and also increase the amount of noise at the site. These stands are a requirement of the EPPP and the football club have chosen the smallest possible options to meet the requirements and they envisage that

the people using these would be existing parents who already come to watch and currently have to stand around the pitch.

As part of the previous application for floodlighting a noise impact assessment was submitted and as a result of this Environmental Health specified hours of operation on the floodlights. Although no reference by them has been made to the floodlights now proposed, it is felt pertinent to include this same condition in the event that permission is granted.

Would the development have significant adverse impacts on highway safety?

Concerns have been raised that the proposed developments (most notably the indoor pitch within the City Council's area) would increase the amount of traffic to the site. However the Transport Statement concludes that the provision of all facilities on one site would ensure that there are fewer traffic movements between numerous sites and therefore overall traffic movements would be fewer. Although the applicant has indicated that several new jobs may be created as a result of the proposal, this is fairly limited with many "new" staff already being employed at the site and working in cramped conditions within the existing academy. It must also be noted that a Travel Plan was submitted as part of the original application and the existing permission requires progress reports for the first five years to be submitted and approved. An updated Travel Plan has been submitted as part of this application and there is a further opportunity for the Local Planning Authorities to impose a similar condition upon any consent granted for the development now being considered. This would encourage the use of sustainable methods of transport to and from the site.

If indeed there is a reduction in overall vehicle movements to and from the site, the concerns raised by residents within the adjoining residential roads that provide access to the site should not come to pass. The existing and proposed Travel Plans for the site should reduce movements further as travel initiatives increase. In this connection the improvement of lighting from Rose Tree Avenue would be a positive manner in which people could be encouraged to access the site by cycle and on foot. Although no such measures were previously sought by this Planning Authority, the scale of the further developments now proposed does justify serious consideration being given to this aspect – to support green travel objectives.

In terms of damage being caused to the roads by construction traffic and large vehicles (coaches) this is something that would need to be investigated and dealt with from a highway perspective by the relevant Highway Authority, using Highways Act legislation. In order to avoid a duplication of controls no planning condition would be appropriate.

It is accepted that construction traffic could inevitably impact upon amenity on these residential roads in the short term. There may be some means to reduce this impact by requiring the submission and approval of a Construction Method Statement and a condition to this effect is included within the recommendation above.

The issue of conflict with other pedestrian and vehicular traffic using this route relating to vehicle movements further up the access track to service the indoor pitch facility and provide disabled access spaces is felt to be an issue for consideration by the City Council, rather than the Borough Council and should be dealt with as part of their consideration of the proposal within their area.

Would the development either increase flood risk or be at risk itself?

The previous applications at this site were subject to a lot of consideration of flooding and replacement floodstorage on site and this appears to have been acceptable. The current proposal which is also supported by a flood risk assessment is acceptable to the Environment Agency subject to the inclusion of several conditions. On this basis it is therefore felt that based upon the works undertaken as part of the previous developments and those proposed now, the development should not have an adverse impact upon flood risk.

Are there any other matters which need to be addressed by the Borough Council with respect to its application?

Due to the nature of the proposals on the land within the Borough on existing well maintained playing fields, there should be no adverse impact upon ecology relating to this element of the proposals, notwithstanding the comments received from Natural England (which concern the whole proposal). Consideration was given to protection for great crested newts as part of the construction phase for the original academy however due to the current layout of the site and the location of the substantial building works towards the centre of the site,

this is not felt to be an issue now. The City Council will have to give due consideration to all ecology interests that could be impacted upon by the proposals within their boundary due particularly to the heavily wooded area adjacent to the proposed indoor pitch building and the nature of the site for that building and the additional pitches.

Again due to the location of the significant works within the Borough there would not be any adverse impact from them upon trees.

A condition relating to the landscaping of the wider site is felt appropriate to ensure views into and out of the site are protected and a holistic approach is taken to landscaping on the site as a whole.

The condition sought by the Borough's Environmental Health Division in relation to hours of construction is not felt necessary in this instance due to the location of the proposals in relation to nearby residential properties. If noise is caused by the construction of the proposals, this can be controlled by other legislation available to Environmental Health, and a prohibition by condition on all construction activity whatsoever outside of certain hours would not be reasonable anyway.

Do the required very special circumstances exist to justify approval?

As the NPPF indicates inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and it should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Local Planning Authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The NPPF also goes on to state that "*The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence*".

The applicant's case for very special circumstances in this application deals with all elements of the proposal and not just those within the Borough. The case can be summarised as follows:-

- (1) The need for the proposal arising from the recent introduction of the EPPP and its requirements and the club's top flight status and future aspirations and sustainability.

The original academy proposals were borne out of meeting the FA's requirements for 'Charter for Quality' which has now been superseded by the EPPP. Having the essential and desirable criteria does not guarantee a specified category status but not having it almost certainly ensures that the Club wouldn't achieve it. It is therefore in the interests of clubs at the pinnacle of the game to strive to achieve this not only to protect their long term sustainability but also to improve the national standards of the country which is also a key issue within the EPPP. The proposed facilities are to be used almost exclusively by the academy and staff and only if required by the professionals (e.g. during adverse weather)

- (2) The site requirements for a football academy and Stoke City FC itself;

Based upon the existing investment at the site and the location of other facilities on site it is not seen as realistic to provide these elsewhere.

- (3) The continued protection of the site as an open recreation area;

The proposal seeks to improve the established facilities to enable the club to continue to use the site for its academy and first team training in a manner that meets the top category of the FA's new requirements but at the same time result in the continued protection of the site as an open recreation area. The LPA acknowledged that the site's open character would be retained through the academy's proposals (09/112/FUL) and the current proposals would result in just 6.35% of the total site area being covered by buildings which would not significantly prejudice the open character of the area.

- (4) The proposal has been prepared to ensure that any impact on the openness of the Green Belt is kept to an absolute minimum;

The club has only proposed development that is essential to enable the club to secure Category 1 status in order to keep the amount of built development to the minimum and in turn ensure that any impact on the openness of the Green Belt is kept to an absolute minimum. Furthermore the project team has spent significant time considering the best locations for the proposals which is illustrated in more detail within the Design and Access statement. This also involved numerous discussions with both LPAs, Urban Vision and the Strategic Planning Consultative Group at the Borough Council.

- (5) The proposal would have an acceptable impact on the visual amenity of the Green Belt;

The proposal takes into consideration its surrounding context and would not injure the visual amenity of the Green Belt or Area of Landscape Maintenance by virtue of its siting, materials or design and does not materially detract from the high quality of landscape. In fact it is considered that the proposals would compliment their surroundings well and enhance the quality of the environment in which they would be situated which is illustrated within the Design and Access Statement in detail.

- (6) The proposal would not prejudice the purposes of the Green Belt outlined in the NPPF;

It is considered that none of the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt as advocated by the NPPF would be prejudiced by the proposals as the only one that could be argued to be relevant in this case is 'safeguarding the countryside from encroachment' however as previously highlighted the proposals are to sustain the future of Stoke City FC and therefore preserve the openness of the overall site with only a small percentage taken up by built development.

- (7) The proposal would result in benefits to the local community and economy;

In addition to the clear benefits of delivering the proposed improvements to the academy to Stoke City FC and the national game, the proposal would result in further benefits to the local community and economy. This includes the freeing up of the club's indoor pitch for full time community use and potential limited use of the indoor pitch by the local community. The proposal would increase the level and improve the standards of provision of sports facilities in the area and also create jobs that would in turn assist with economic growth.

- (8) The proposal would enable all key academy facilities to be provided on one site and in turn reduce the need to travel. The proposal would therefore have sustainable benefits;

As indicated in the Travel Plan submitted as part of this application the proposals would actually reduce the overall vehicle movements to and from the site with all the facilities within the one location – a key feature within the EPPP advocated by the FA. This is to ensure up and coming talent have the best possible environments to further all aspects of their education.

- (9) There is support for the proposals from the local community; and

The pre-application engagement with the local community has revealed that the vast majority of local residents who took part are in full support of the proposals and that no residents objected to them. Given that the local residents who have been consulted live adjacent to this part of the North Staffordshire Green Belt and benefit from the amenity it provides, this is considered to be a relevant and valuable factor in the determination of these proposals.

- (10) The proposals are acceptable in all other respects

The proposals comply with all other relevant material considerations:-

- Design of the Proposal.
- Impact upon the Highway Network.
- Impact upon Residential Amenity.
- Acceptability in relation to the considerations of flood risk, ground conditions/land contamination, ecology and trees.
- The loss of the playing field is currently in private ownership and it is felt that the club that uses this facility can be accommodated elsewhere.

Your Officer's assessment of Applicant's Case

In terms of "harm" the proposals represent a further reduction in the openness of this part of the Green Belt. There is no doubt that the development in that it enlarges the academy building and introduces other structures has to be seen to be harmful to the Green Belt, both by definition and by its effect. The development has to be viewed as contrary to the objective of protecting the countryside for its own sake. However it is recognised that the main element of the proposal is an extension of an existing building whilst the spectator stands are relatively minor elements in the context of the adjoining buildings.

The proposals at least on the Newcastle side do have a functional connection with the open space upon which they are located. The majority of the site would be retained principally and substantially open in nature.

Your Officer's view is that the case is essentially one based upon the particular requirements of a Premier League club that is seeking to maintain its top academy status, faced with requirements from the awarding body. This is a persuasive and significant material consideration. A further argument is that compared with other similar clubs the existing premises at Clayton Wood are in fact relatively modest in terms of their scale.

Taking all of the above into consideration it is considered that the "very special circumstances" case has been made with respect to those proposals within the Borough that constitute inappropriate development.

Background Papers

Planning file

Planning documents referred to

Date Report Prepared

25 June 2012