

Planning Committee

Wednesday, 1 March 2023

7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Brian Sangha (Chair)
Cllr Emma Morley (Acting Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Brian Francis
Gary Harding
Bob Lane
Lyn Milner
Tony Rice
Gurbax Singh

Note: Councillors: John Burden and Mochrie-Cox were also in attendance

Shazad Ghani	Service Manager (Planning)
Richard Hart	Team Leader (Development Management)
Alison Webster	Career Grade Planner (Development Management)
Laura Caiels	Assistant Head of Legal Services (Place Team)
Karen Gingles	Committee Service Officer (Minutes)

51. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Craske and Mulheran. Councillors Milner and Singh attended as their substitutes. There was also an apology from Councillor Jassal.

52. To sign the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday 1 February 2023 were signed by the Chair.

53. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

54. Planning applications for determination by the Committee

54.1 20221293 - Cascades Leisure Centre, Thong Lane, Gravesend

The Committee considered application 20221293 - Cascades Leisure Centre, Thong Lane, Gravesend. The application was for the demolition of the existing Cascades Leisure Centre and public house and redevelopment of the site to provide a new leisure centre with

community pool, leisure water, cafe, trim trail, soft play, 'clip n climb' facility, a six court sports hall, fitness suite, spin studio, 2 no. fitness studios, 2 no. squash courts, a new tennis/netball court, improvements to the existing play area, landscaping across the site and associated car parking.

The Planning Officer outlined key points from the report:

- The proposed site would include 257 car parking spaces of which 15 were accessible spaces and approximately 25 spaces would have electric charging capabilities. Members were also informed that there would also be the facility of an overflow car park to provide additional parking on competition days.
- The proposed new leisure centre would be constructed on the existing visitor car park as this was considered to be the best position for the new centre having the least impact on biodiversity. The location would also mean that the existing playground and kick about area would remain, but with a new trim trail surrounding it.
- Members were informed that the proposed build site was on previously developed land and prior to being a leisure centre, the site had served as an airfield. The proposal was deemed to be in line with the NPPF Green Belt policy set out in Section 13.
- Members attention was drawn to photographs showing the exterior of the proposed new leisure centre. The Committee were informed that the architect had used a pallet of green, copper, brown and grey coloured aluminium, to replicate the natural colours of the leafy locality of the site, with the riveted metal depicting cladding of aircraft dating back to the period of RAF Gravesend.
- The Committee were informed that some trees would be lost to make way for the development, however a tree replacement plan would ensure replacement native trees of varying species would be replanted on site to increase biodiversity.
- Members were advised that a key consideration for the new centre was to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions omitted from the site. The Planning Officer advised that the applicant had produced a proposal that had been designed to Passivhaus Standards, to achieve a high energy performance certificate. This approach was in line with the Council's adopted Climate Change Strategy Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The Planning Officer noted that there was a clear public benefit associated with the proposal, enabling people to live healthier lifestyles and promote participation in sports.
- The proposed development was deemed to be a sustainable form of development that accorded with national and local planning policy.

The Chair asked for clarification regarding public engagement in notification of the planning application and any feedback received. The Planning Officer confirmed that the application had been advertised with 6 site notices surrounding and within the site. Individual letters had also been sent to 41 properties along with Southern Valley Golf Club, Regan's Bar and Legend Sports. She advised the Committee that there had been 1 letter of objection which had raised concern regarding the preapplication consultation stage, rather than the application itself. Overall, there had been 4 letters of representation, 3 in support of the application and 1 against.

The committee were invited to ask questions for clarification and raised the following:

- Clarification was sought regarding the location of the bus stop and that a bus shelter with appropriate signage, inclusive of wheelchair users, would be produced. The Service Manager (Planning) advised that the exact location was yet to be decided but would be located within the site on an internal access road, potentially opposite the play area. The Planning Officer confirmed that the shelter and signage could be conditioned for approval, to ensure this was implemented. Members asked that the bus stop be fully accessible for wheelchair users and those with prams/buggies and for the route from the bus stop to the centre to be easily accessible.
- Members made reference to the hardstanding at the edge of the proposed site and whether there could be further trees planted to soften the area. Members were advised that only a proportion of the hard standing was within the proposed site and for the purpose of the application, only the area within the site could be considered.
- The Committee queried the trees that were marked to be removed and whether this could be reduced. Reference was made to a particular tree that was planted by the Boy's Brigade in the 1980's with a commemorative plaque and part of local history. The Planning Officer assured the Committee that the plan relating to the removal of trees had been amended slightly and that the tree in question would remain.
- Members sought clarification relating to public rights of way and whether there was direct access into the site that may have to be altered. The Planning Officer advised that there were no public rights of way running through the site and therefore none were affected by the application.
- Concern was raised due to construction being undertaken on the site of the former RAF Gravesend Airfield and potential risk of unexploded ordnance. The Service Manager (Planning) addressed this issue and advised the Committee that a UXO (unexploded ordnance) survey provided relevant evidence. He advised there would be an ongoing condition in place to mitigate and manage the risk unexploded ordnance would pose during the development process.
- Members asked if there would be ongoing consultation with residents throughout the process. The Service Manager (Planning) confirmed this would be dealt with as part of the construction management plan.
- The Chair highlighted that the application had significant support from Sport England and as such, pointed out to the Committee that this carried significant weight. However, the Chair queried why Sport England were not in attendance on that basis. The Service Manager (Planning) informed Members that the organisation did not attend such meetings due to resources, but Sport England had been consulted throughout the process and also informed the evidence base of the proposal. He informed Members that the organisation held substantial weight, as their whole remit was to increase participation in sport and promote people to live healthier lifestyles.

The Committee heard the views of a registered speaker in favour of the application and had their questions answered:

- Members queried why the design and materials were chosen and how this factored in the heritage of the site. The speaker informed Members that during the consultation period, as the site was located within Green Belt and an open green leafy site, there had been a strong message to respond to the surroundings of the site, so the use of greens, copper and natural colours complimented the location. He

went on to say that the aluminium materials chosen represented the Spitfire with a riveted feel. It was felt this approach tied in well with the airfield heritage.

- Responding to concern regarding access from the new bus stop to the proposed leisure centre, the speaker confirmed that the route leading up and into the centre would be completely smooth with level access for all.
- The Chair expressed the importance of considering the residents during the construction process and asked if the speaker would be committed to continuing the local consultation throughout the process. The Speaker informed the Committee that this would be considered and could for example include workshops to gather feedback from local residents and stakeholders.
- Members queried whether active travel had been considered. The speaker informed the Committee that active travel had indeed been thought about and that it would be important to link the centre with footpaths and cycle routes in the future. The Service Manager (Planning) emphasised that the planning application has to be considered as it was before Members and that KCC as the highways authority had raised no objections in relation to access and transport.
- Concern was raised regarding the risk of any unexploded WW2 bombs being disturbed and detonated during construction, especially with the existing leisure centre being used by the public. The speaker assured the Committee that there was a specialist consultant appointed to deal with UXO surveys. The surveys would be carried out throughout the development of the site and was a requirement under the UXO remit.
- The Committee enquired about the timeframe for completion and were advised that from commencement it was anticipated to take two years for the development to be completed.
- Members sought clarity on how the heritage of the site would be presented to visitors and whether it may be appropriate to have a memorial within the new building. The Committee were notified that there was the intention to have a historical montage/display within the meet and greet area, however details and materials for this were being finalised.

The Committee heard the views of a registered speaker against the application and had their questions answered:

- Following concerns The Service Manager (Planning) reiterated to the Committee that letters were sent to residents and neighbouring businesses making them aware of the proposal.
- Members queried if there were to be access issues for users of Legend Sports, public transport could also be encouraged. The Service Manager (Planning) advised that Legends had their own car park and access to the site would remain open, as the existing Cascades building would still be in operation. It was noted that there may be occasions when site access may change, but this would be dealt with by the property team and not the planning department. He informed the speaker it would be requested that the property team engage with Legend Sports during the development stage, to discuss the effects of the building works, however this was not a consideration for the planning application.

Following discussion, the Committee raised the following points:

- Members expressed that they would like active travel to connect to the new centre in the future. The Service Manager (Planning) reiterated that active travel was out of the remit of the application and therefore not a consideration for approval. He went on to inform Members that there was a trim trail and there would be enhanced external activity plus secure cycle storage on site, to encourage travel by bike. The Chair commented that the Council should take Members views on board as part of wider proposals to increase walking and cycling in the Borough.
- The Committee all agreed that the proposed development would be an asset to the area, improving health and fitness and would be of great benefit to residents and visitors to the borough.

The Chair concluded that the application presented had undertaken considerable consideration over a number of years and offered a well-balanced report that was not only endorsed by Sport England, but complied with the Government's pledge to increase and improve fitness.

RESOLVED that application 20221293 be delegated to Service Manager (Planning) to grant Permission in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee subject to the applicant agreeing pre-commencement conditions and finalisation of planning conditions.

Note: Justin O'Brian (Space & Place) spoke in favour of the application and Skye Daines spoke against the application.

55. Planning applications determined under delegated powers by the Director (Environment)

A schedule showing applications determined by the Director (Environment) under delegated powers had been published on the Council's website.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:17pm