

## 4. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The original planning application was made 11<sup>th</sup> February 1998 and was approved in 1999. The current planning application was submitted in December 2004 and was approved by Sunderland Council Committee decision on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2005 subject to various conditions.

### 4.2 National policies and guidance

#### **PPG17**

4.2.1 This is highly relevant to this scheme proposal. At section 16 PPG17 states, regarding development in open spaces:

*'The recreational quality of open spaces can be eroded by insensitive development or incremental loss of the site. In considering planning applications - either within or adjoining open space - local authorities should weigh any benefits being offered to the community against the loss of open space that will occur. Planning authorities may wish to allow small scale structures where these would support the existing recreational uses (for example, interpretation centres, toilets, and refreshment facilities), or would provide facilities for new recreational uses. They should seek to ensure that all proposed development takes account of, and is sensitive to, the local context.'*

In approving the development the Council has obviously concluded that the scheme has been sensitively designed to provide for the new recreational use and the buildings are of a small scale appropriate to the use and is therefore, compatible with the PPG17 guidance.

4.2.2 At section PPG17 it states:

*'Local authorities should:*

- i. avoid any erosion of recreational function and maintain or enhance the character of open spaces;*
- ii. ensure that open spaces do not suffer from increased overlooking, traffic flows or other encroachment; iii. protect and enhance those parts of the rights of way network that might benefit open space; and*
- iii. consider the impact of any development on biodiversity and nature conservation.'*

The local authority has considered all these matters in making its decision and in approving the scheme has considered it is compliant.

4.2.3 PPG17 at section 20 outlines general principles to be considered and those of particular relevance to the development include :

*'In identifying where to locate new areas of open space, sports and recreational facilities:*

- *promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for people with disabilities;.....*
- *avoid any significant loss of amenity to residents, neighbouring uses or biodiversity;*
- *improve the quality of the public realm through good design;.....*
- *add to and enhance the range and quality of existing facilities;*
- *carefully consider security and personal safety, especially for children;*
- *assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion; and*
- *consider the recreational needs of visitors and tourists.'*

The scheme delivers all of these objectives.

4.2.4 At section 24 PPG17 states that with regard to open spaces:

*'In planning for new open spaces and in assessing planning applications for development, local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the local open space network,.....'*

And at section 32 PPG17 states with regards to Recreational Rights of Way

*'Rights of way are an important recreational facility, which local authorities should protect and enhance. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks.'*

By providing dedicated public access to Russell Wood and maintaining the footpath 60 the scheme complies with this objective.

4.2.5 The PPG17 Companion guide states at section 10.16 sets greenspace standards and notes:

*'There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate that regular contact with the natural world contributes to people's well-being and relatively passive but frequent recreation within natural greenspaces can provide significant health benefits. This is the basis for English Nature's Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt) (see endnote 23), which advocates that every home should be within 300 m of an accessible natural greenspace of at least 2 ha, plus*

- At least one accessible 20 ha site within 2 km
- At least one accessible 100 ha site within 5 km
- At least one accessible 500 ha site within 10 km'

4.2.6 Chapter 2 of this ES describes the current greenspace provision. The companion guide to PPG17 states at 10.23 that value of open space relates mainly to three things:

- “**Context:** a space or facility which is inaccessible is almost irrelevant to potential users and therefore may be of little value, irrespective of its quality...”

This scheme dedicates open space in Russell Wood in an accessible location close to local people which means it can be well used. It also generates wider benefits for biodiversity

4.2.7 At 10.25 the companion guide states that evaluating wider benefits is complicated. These wider benefits can include landscape, ecological, educational, social, amenity and economic benefits.

Structural and landscape benefits are derived when well located, high quality greenspaces help to define the identity and character of an area, and separate it from other areas nearby – the fundamental principle behind green belts and green wedges. The use of pitches is entirely consistent with the status of the land in the UDP as a settlement break. The site is not in the greenbelt.

Ecological benefits can derive when greenspaces support biodiversity, provide habitats for wildlife and may exhibit geological features. This scheme includes native planting onsite and replacement native planting offsite.

Education benefits are derived from greenspaces offer opportunities for people to see nature at work, and this will be possible at the site.

Social inclusion and health benefits can derive when high quality parks, other greenspaces and sport and recreation facilities, promote civic pride, community ownership and a sense of belonging and can help to promote well-being. Greenspaces are also one of the very few publicly accessible facilities which are equally available to everyone, irrespective of personal circumstances. This scheme delivers these objectives.

Amenity benefits and a 'sense of place' can be created. Greenspaces and sport and recreation facilities help to make villages, towns and cities attractive places in which to live, provided local people see them as safe, well maintained and attractive. The pitches will be carefully maintained and their surroundings planted to make the site an attractive place to see and visit.

While the pitches will not provide economic benefit as the League is a charity, neither will they provide disbenefit.

### **4.3 Regional guidance: North East of England Regional Spatial Strategy Proposed changes May 2007 (RSS)**

4.3.1 Sunderland City Council's Green Space Strategy, December 2007 provides a useful summary of parts of the RSS that relate to green spaces in the city. It summarises its role:

*'The regional spatial strategy (RSS) sets out a broad development strategy for the Region for the period up to 2021. It covers matters relating to priorities for environment, such as countryside and biodiversity protection, sustainable communities, delivering economic prosperity and improving accessibility and connectivity for the north east region.'*

4.3.2 The RSS has strategic policies aimed at conserving, enhancing and capitalising upon the region's diverse natural and built environment, heritage and culture. In particular the part K objective of policy 2 states an objective of Promoting the concept of green infrastructure, a network of linked, multifunctional green space in and around the region's towns and cities" and this scheme would help to deliver recreational space to meet this objective.

4.3.3 Other RSS policies of relevance to green space include the following;

- Policy 33 Have regard to landscape character assessments
- Policy 35 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Policy 38 Trees, Woodlands and Forests

In granting permission for this scheme the Council addressed these policies.

### **4.4 The North East Regional Plan for Sport and Physical Activity 2004-2008 (Sport England)**

4.4.1 This document sets out how a culture of physical activity can be promoted throughout the region. The Action Plan includes a priority policy area relating to structures and partnership, this identifies a policy proposal as follows:-

*"to get involved with the informal sport and physical activity sector and promote activity in informal settings in both urban areas and the wider countryside".*

4.4.2 It states that

*'This will be achieved through getting involved with the informal sport and physical activity to help promote activities, such as 'green exercise' plans (informal exercise such as walking, cycling and running on the rights of way network, country parks, publicly accessible open spaces and so on), and make the most of the region's urban 'soft' (grassy) public open spaces for sport, recreation and play.'*

This scheme provides open space provision that could contribute to the objectives.

#### **4.5 Sunderland Playing Pitch Strategy (2004-2011)**

4.5.1 This was published in 2003 and adopted by Cabinet for Culture, Arts, Sport and Leisure in April 2004 and covers the period 2004-2011. It was updated in October 2004. The plan identifies demand for sports playing pitches (football, rugby union/league, cricket and hockey). It details by area regeneration framework boundary playing pitch land requirements. The Strategy also assesses the quality of provision and calculates current and future demand based on known carrying capacity.

Its objectives include:

- *"To increase the number of adult football pitches that are available for allocation in the main areas of demand.*
- *Increase the number of pitches and associated facilities to accommodate the predicted growth in girls and mini soccer."*

Regarding supply of facilities for football it states:

- *"There are 65 senior and 21 mini soccer pitches in Sunderland*
- *There is overuse of pitches in 4 areas of Sunderland and significant under use in Washington*
- *There is only one pitch available in Sunderland East*
- *The quality of the pitches due to poor drainage restricted use*
- *The lack of appropriate ancillary facilities restricts use in some areas and increases pressure on other areas. There is a particular shortage of ancillary facilities for girls' football and mini soccer."*

4.5.2 With respect to demand it states that 'previously there was a geographical preference for football pitches in Sunderland and less demand for pitches in Washington. It is proposed that future provision to develop three levels of provision with appropriate service standards for each level.' It also states that the Football Association and the Football Foundation are currently reviewing matters surrounding the provision of football in the city.

This scheme should be considered in the context of this identified demand.

#### **4.6 The Great North Forest Local Management- Local Management Zone Strategies (non-statutory document January 2003)**

4.6.1 The site is in the great North Forest Area, shown on Figure 4.1. The Great North Forest is a partnership between Natural England, the Forestry Commission and five local authorities. It was established and published its first plan in 2003 to '*realise opportunities for the countryside to make a greater contribution to the quality of its local communities*'.

4.6.2 The Great North Forest covers 160 square kilometres, of which 30% lies within the city of Sunderland. The Great North Forest Plan identifies 31 Local management zones in 3 broad areas: 2 of which affect Sunderland these being the Magnesian Limestone Plateau and Western Hills.

4.6.3 The plan provides guidance to the council in terms of how its actions and activities may affect the landscape of the Great North Forest. By adopting the plan Sunderland City supports the objectives of the Great North Forest, to create new woodland habitats wherever feasible. The development of the site is consistent with the objectives of the Great North Forest Plan which includes recreational and sporting use as well as tree planting.

#### **4.7 Sunderland City Council UDP policy**

4.7.1 The UDP was adopted in 1998 and is currently under review with policies being saved until such a time as the new LDF can be adopted. It is therefore still the development plan for the area. It contains a number of policies covering open space, sports and recreation. It relies upon the 1994 Open Space Recreation Report and, due to the date it was developed, does not explicitly follow all the detailed guidance of the current PPG17. The Council is however, is working towards developing an Open Space Strategy, but until such a time Policy L5 provides a guide as to the amount, type and distribution of open space considered to be necessary. This has been addressed in Chapter 2 of the ES.

4.7.2 Figure 4.1 shows the UDP policy areas relevant to the site.

4.7.3 Specific policies contained within Chapter 8 include L1, a general policy which covers provision of recreation and leisure facilities; and three policies (L4-L6) that provide standards for outdoor sport and recreation, amenity open space and children's play space; but do not address specifically the demand for facilities for children's Youth League pitches.

- 4.7.4 The Built Environment Chapter contains an important policy (B3) that relates to protection of public and private urban green space. Policy B3 is used to control any harmful effects that development may have to such open space, and it also recognises the need to retain open space of public value. The Council has tested this scheme against this policy and has clearly decided in giving permission that it would not have a harmful effect.
- 4.7.5 Chapter 9 of the UDP is of relevance as it relates to environmental protection; these matters are dealt within this ES. Chapter 11 relating to the countryside and nature conservation is also of particular importance especially in relation to green corridors, natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces and open countryside in the urban fringe. Policies include CN6-importance of open breaks and wedges, CN7-urban fringe, CN15-CN17-woodlands and forestry and CN18-CN23 nature conservation and wildlife corridors (particularly pertinent to identifying green corridors and value of open space). The site is not in the greenbelt but is in a settlement break defined by settlement breaks. The proposed use is consistent with plan status.
- 4.7.6 In relation to identifying green corridors and accessible countryside in the urban fringe, chapter 15 of the UDP contains 2 policies (T9, T10) covering cycling and paths and multi-user routes and Figure 15.2 in the UDP shows a network of those that are existing and proposed. Footpath 60 crosses the site and access proposed in Russell Wood so this scheme is compliant with these policies.
- 4.7.7 The UDP contains important and useful information on open space, sports and recreation provision. This information covers primarily the provision of open space, sports and recreation in the city. Appendix 3 is a schedule of regional sports and recreational facilities (outdoor) and provision of open space (district, local and neighbourhood) alongside allotments. At the time of adoption, the city was identified as being below the National Playing Fields Association recommended standard (1 hectare per 1,000 population) for outdoor sport. However, the city was close to the amenity open space standard laid down in 1983 of 2 hectares per 1,000 population. This provides a further justification for the need for these new pitches.
- 4.7.8 Relevant UDP policies were identified at the time of the Planning Application and addressed in the Committee report and these are addressed in section 4.9

#### **4.8 Key information and research**

##### ***Sunderland City Council Open Space Register 2007 and Green Space Strategy***

- 4.8.1 The register identifies the location, type and size of open space based upon the typology contained within the Annex to PPG17. The current register dates back to 2003 but has been updated during 2007. In identifying how to categorise the type of

open space, as suggested in PPG17 the primary purpose i.e. the main function of the space was used as a guide

4.8.2 The register is currently being reviewed and will form the quantitative assessment of open space in the city in the future.

#### ***Quantity and type of open space 2007***

4.8.3 Listed below is information taken from the Open Space register in relation to the amount of coverage of city by type of green space as a % value

- Parks and Gardens 3.5%
- Natural and semi natural greenspace including woodland 5.2%
- Green Corridors (not defined)
- Outdoor sports facilities 3.4% (this does not include school playing fields or facilities located outside of the city boundary)
- Amenity greenspace 5.4%
- Provision for children and young people (118 sites currently)
- Allotments 104 sites (council only)
- Cemeteries and disused churchyards 0.06%
- Accessible countryside in the urban fringe 32.8%
- Coast and river 10km coast and 13km river approximately

4.8.4 In total, it is estimated over 18% of the city is covered by open space; (excluding accessible countryside in the urban fringe, civic spaces and school playing fields/pitches. The proposal for the new pitches adds to the provision in Sunderland, without adversely impacting on other open space use. Half of the site is currently agricultural land which is not defined as accessible open space.

#### **4.9 Sunderland City Council April 2005 Committee report**

4.9.1 When the planning permission was granted, the report at note 2 referred to the policies in the Unitary Development Plan considered relevant to the site. Each is addressed in summary here. The text in italics identifies how each of the policies has been addressed.

- B\_2\_Scale, massing layout and setting of new developments. *The site buildings are of an appropriate scale and standard for the green space setting and sporting use. This has been guaranteed by condition 3 and 4.*

- B11 Protection of archaeological heritage. *An assessment has been carried out implementing both geophysical investigation and trial trenching.*
- B\_13\_Sites and monuments of local importance affected by development. *The site has been thoroughly investigated.*
- B26 telecommunications (presumed to be a typographical error)
- M\_5\_Establishing a need for opencast coal where objections arise (presumed to be a typographical error)
- CN\_6\_Retain / enhance important open breaks & wedges between / within settlements. *Recreational and sporting use is appropriate to green wedges*
- CN\_15\_Creation of the Great North Forest. *The proposed replacement planting at Doxford park is within the Great North Forest on the Magnesian Limestone Plateau, therefore the overall amount of forest is not altered by the development.*
- CN17 Trees and TPOs. *A landscape scheme and replacement planting is proposed in mitigation of the tree felling.*
- HA\_20\_Planting of Tree Belts and Woodlands. *As C15 and C17*
- T\_14\_Accessibility of new developments, need to avoid congestion and safety problems arising. *The site is accessible by public transport, walking and cycling and will not cause congestion or safety problems. There is adequate parking.*
- T\_21\_Factors to be taken into account in the provision of parking. *The trip generation figures show the parking to be adequate.*
- T\_22\_Parking standards in new developments. *As T21*
- EN1 Improving the environment. *The site would improve the environment through implementation of tree planting schemes, dedication of woodland and the mitigation strategy.*
- EN12 Flood risk & water quality. *There would be no adverse effect on water quality and it is not on the flood plain*
- EN14 ground conditions. *An assessment has been carried out and a remediation strategy proposed.*

4.9.2 The report to the Committee identified that the key issues to consider in relation to the proposal are:

- The principle of the use- saying this was already established as appropriate in the setting of the settlement break.
- The layout/design- which had been modified to follow recommendations of Sport England.

- Tree removal – it noted the commitment to compensatory tree planting.
- Highway/Access Issues- it noted the parking was adequate and that pedestrian access would be agreed.

4.9.3 Where environmental matters have been addressed by imposition of a condition this is referred to in the technical sections of the ES.

***Summary of the effect of the scheme on open space provision***

4.9.4 Review of Ordnance Survey maps of the vicinity of the site shows the distributed nature of the settlement pattern leaves much land which could be considered to be open space. A proportion of it is however, agricultural land either being grazed or in arable production and it is therefore not truly accessible. Section 2 of this Environmental Statement reports the findings of a study of the availability of open space in the local area.

4.9.5 The annex to PPG 17 defines open space as,

*‘Open space is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground. However, in applying the policies in this Guidance, open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity.’*

4.9.6 The southern half of the application site is a field in agricultural use so is not available for use by local people. It is of relevance to consider its visual amenity despite this lack of access and this is addressed elsewhere in this report.

4.9.7 As already described, the northern wooded half of the site was fenced to prevent the public from roaming freely though this has been vandalised and has fallen into a state of disrepair. There are no proposals to put a security fence around the football pitches and it is therefore conceivable that when matches are not in progress, people may choose to walk across the development area.

4.9.8 Since the scheme would not decrease the amount of land with authorised access it can not be considered to have an adverse effect upon the availability of public open space. In fact PPG17 recognises the value of sporting facilities and local children will be able to join the League and have a new play facility close to them.