

Planning Services
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 1SS

Reference: 235001

By email

18 December 2020

Verve Planning

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Reg no. 11491335

Dear Sir / Madam

**The Weald Lawn Tennis & Squash Racquets Club, South Bank, Hassocks,
BN6 8JP
Pre-application enquiry**

On behalf of our client, The Weald Lawn Tennis & Squash Racquets Club (the club), we are pleased to submit a request for pre-application advice in respect of erecting a permanent roof structure over two tennis courts to provide the club with an all-weather facility.

In addition to this supporting letter, the submission is accompanied by:

- Completed pre application form;
- Letter from the club Tennis Chairman, dated 1.12.20;
- Site Location Plan - ref GA(00)00 - prepared by Fletcher Crane Architects;
- Pre-application document, prepared by Fletcher Crane Architects, containing:
 - Photographs of the existing site and surroundings
 - Plans, sections and elevation drawings of the proposal
 - CGIs and illustrations.

The pre-app fee of £1,140 (incl VAT) is included, to cover a meeting and advice letter.

Site and surroundings

A comprehensive set of photos showing the site and surroundings is included in the separate document.

The club occupies a large irregular shaped site to the south of Hassocks village. The site falls in levels from north to south. It is accessed via the eastern end of South Bank. The car park, two storey clubhouse and indoor squash courts are in the north / north east part of the site. The rest of the site comprises tennis courts, landscaping and trees/woodland.

The club currently has 14 tennis courts in total, comprising six floodlit hard courts, four floodlit clay courts and four mini-tennis courts (not floodlit). This proposal relates to hardcourts 6 and 7, at the southern end of the site.

The site is bounded:

- to the north by houses on South Bank;
- to the east by houses on Hassocks Close;
- to the south by an area of trees/woodland, which are the subject of a tree preservation order (TPO); and
- to the west by houses on Brighton Road with the South Downs Nurseries (identified as an employment site) beyond.

The site is some 150m (at its closest point) from the boundary of the South Downs National Park to the south.

Planning history

There have been several relevant applications at the site over the years. For example:

- 04/02235/FUL - Planning permission was granted for flood lights for courts 2 and 3. NB these are on the northern side of the site.
- 08/02370/FUL - Planning permission was granted for four all-weather courts in lieu of the existing eastern most courts (numbers 2 - 5), refurbishment of the clubhouse, new access roads, parking and footpaths etc. (An extension of time was granted under 11/01010/EOT, and subsequent material amendments under 12/02221/FUL and 12/04198/FUL).
- 09/00952/FUL - Planning permission was granted for nine houses to the east of the tennis club. NB this is now called Hassocks Close.
- DM/16/0553 - Planning permission was granted for installation of floodlights to the four all weather tennis courts. NB, these are the courts granted under 08/02370/FUL (amended) above.

Proposal

The current proposal seeks to add a permanent structural roof /canopy over the two southern most courts (numbers 6 and 7). The framework would be constructed in steel and the roof clad in a light coloured fabric/metal sheeting. The canopy would extend part way down the sides, leaving 3m high chainlink fencing below. Details of the dimensions, design and materials are included in the accompanying document, prepared by Fletcher Crane.

The hardcourts would also be re-surfaced and the lighting replaced.

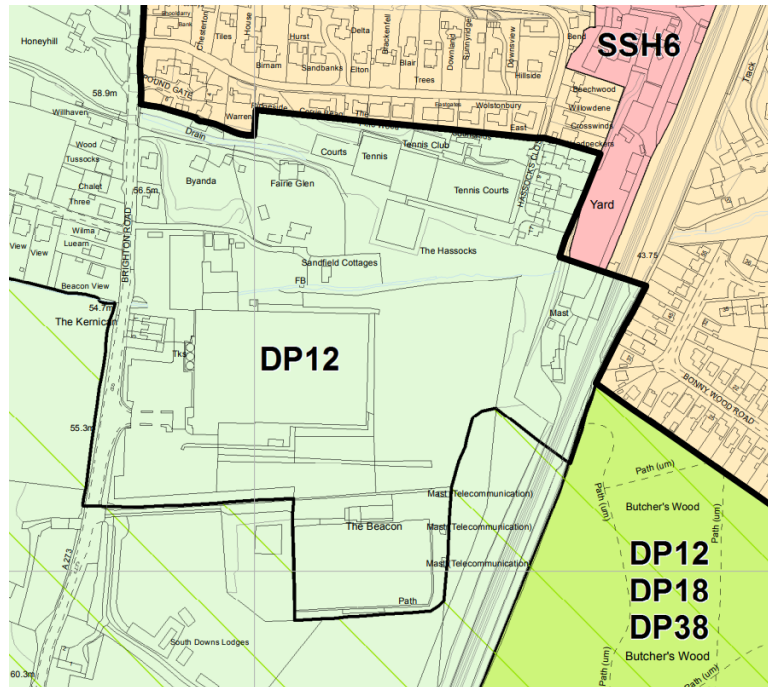
Planning policy context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 explains that determination of applications should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Development Plan

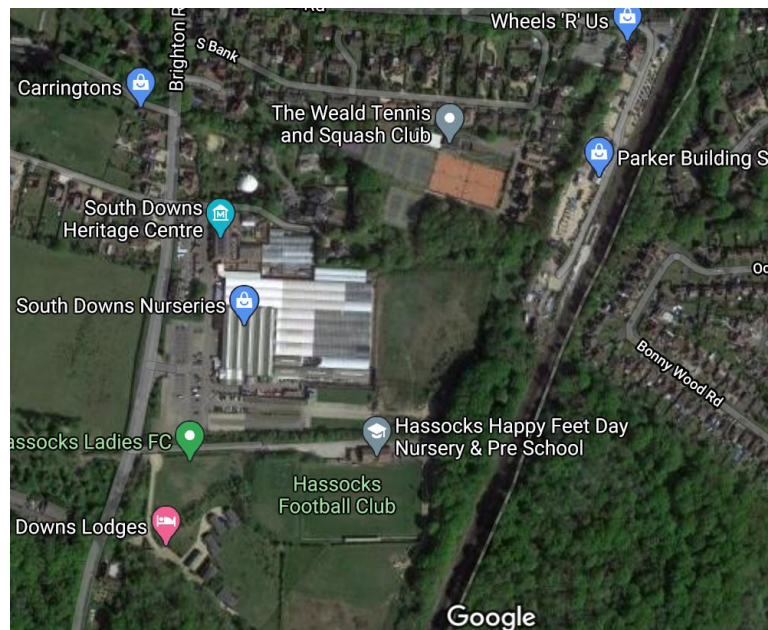
The development plan comprises the Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) (adopted March 2018) and the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) (adopted July 2020).

An extract from the adopted MSDP policies map is below.



The site is washed over in pale green (DP12). It is to the south of the built-up area boundary (thick black line) of Hassocks village and therefore falls within the 'countryside'.

The South Downs National Park lies further south and is identified by the thin green diagonal lines (DP18).



The corresponding Google aerial photo shows that the two southern-most tennis courts (6 & 7) are completely surrounded by built development and trees.

The following MSDP policies are particularly relevant:

- DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside;
- DP13: Preventing Coalescence;
- DP18: Setting of the South Downs National Park;
- DP24: Leisure and Cultural Facilities and Activities (includes tennis courts);
- DP26: Character and Design;
- DP29: Noise, Air and Light Pollution; and
- DP37: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows.

Material considerations

The following documents are also relevant material considerations:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, including:
 - Section 2 Achieving sustainable development
 - Section 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities
 - Section 12 Achieving Well-Designed Places
- Planning Practice Guidance;
- A Landscape Character Assessment for Mid Sussex (2005); and
- A Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape.

Planning Case

Enhanced sporting facilities

A letter from the club's Tennis Chairman is attached, setting out the background and rationale for the proposal.

The club is a well-established sporting venue that is celebrating its centenary this year. Given the size of the club and its prominent position in Tennis Sussex, it is unusual in that it does not already have a covered / indoor tennis facility. Other similar size clubs in Sussex all have at least two covered courts, but the nearest locations are Brighton and Crawley.

Court 6 and 7 are currently due for resurfacing whether the club proceeds with the roof covering or not. The proposal to cover the courts will enable members to use them all year round and in all weather conditions.

Importantly, it will also make the club (and tennis in general) more accessible to a wider user group, including non-members, mixed abilities and mixed age groups. For example, the proposal will:

- be DDA compliant, which expands the facilities for disability tennis, allowing the Weald to hold International Tennis Federation (ITF) events at the club;
- enable the club to host 'matchplay' events that are exclusive to indoor venues only; and
- allow local schools to participate at the club all year round.

The covered tennis courts will enhance the existing facilities and will clearly be a community benefit and meet the Council's Strategic Objectives in the MSDP, including Objective 14 (create environments that are accessible to all members of the community) and 15 (create places that encourage a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle by the provision of first class sporting facilities). They will also comply with Policy DP24 of the MSDP (Leisure and Cultural Facilities and Activities).

Turning to the Neighbourhood Plan, the proposal complies with Strategic Objective 2, 'ensuring all sections of the community have access to key local services, including sport'. Similarly, it complies with HNP Policy 10 (Protection of Open Space) as, in quantitative terms, the space will be maintained (ie two tennis courts) and in qualitative terms it will be significantly enhanced to serve local needs.

Finally, government guidance in paragraph 96 of the NPPF states the importance that access to opportunities for sport and physical activity has on communities' health and well-being. The proposal also complies with paragraph 97 of the NPPF as it both retains and enhances the sporting provision at the club.

Principle of development in countryside and within setting of National Park

There needs to be a sensible balance between the protective countryside policies in the development plan and those that promote enhanced sporting facilities. This is especially the case at this long-established tennis club.

It is acknowledged that the site is designated as 'countryside' (covered by Policy DP12 - Protection and Enhancement of Countryside). However, in reality, it is seen as forming the southern part of the built-up area of Hassocks rather than the open countryside. Nevertheless, the proposal still complies with the council's Strategic Objectives relating to the countryside and Policy DP12. For example: Objective 3 (To protect valued landscapes for their visual, historical and biodiversity qualities); Objective 11 (To support and enhance the attractiveness of Mid Sussex as a visitor destination); and Objective 15 (To create places that encourage a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle by the provision of first class sporting facilities etc).

Bearing in mind the tennis club site is already developed, and courts 6 and 7 are in situ, there will be no increase in development footprint. Importantly, the wide belt of mature trees that wraps around three sides of courts 6 and 7 will provide a good level of screening to the new roof structure from outside the club site. Therefore the quality of the rural and landscape character will be maintained, in accordance with Policy DP12. Also, as required by that countryside policy, it is to be balanced against the policies elsewhere in the MSDP and the Neighbourhood Plan that promote improved sporting facilities.

If required, a document assessing the impact of the proposal on the quality of the rural and landscape character (with reference to the Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment and the West Sussex County Council Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape) can be prepared at the application stage.

Due to the location of the tennis club site (more or less surrounded by housing, the nursery buildings and trees), coupled with the small footprint of the proposal, it will not result in the coalescence of settlements or have an unacceptably urbanising effect on the area between settlements, in accordance with Policy DP13 (Preventing Coalescence).

The South Downs National Park boundary is some 150m away from courts 6 and 7. The same factors discussed in the previous paragraph apply when assessing the proposal against Policy DP18 (Setting of the South Downs National Park). In addition, due to the sensitive design (including a light colour roof covering, and the floodlights shielded by the roof), the proposal will not detract from, or cause detriment to, the visual and special qualities (including dark skies), tranquillity and essential characteristics of the National Park. Nor would it adversely affect the transitional open green spaces between the site and the boundary of the National Park, and the views, outlook and aspect, into and out of the park by virtue of its location, scale, form or design.

Similarly, the proposal complies with Strategic Objectives in the Neighbourhood Plan and Policy 6 (Development Proposals Affecting the South Downs National Park).

Sensitive and high quality design

Turning to general design aspects, Section 12 of the NPPF seeks to achieve well designed places. It advises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF also advises that planning decisions should, inter alia, ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive and are sympathetic to local character.

Although the roof will perform a functional purpose and needs to be a certain height for playing tennis, care has still been taken in the design process to comply with MSDC Policy DP26 (Character and Design) and Neighbourhood Plan Policy 9. Mature trees (within the club's ownership) surround three sides of the tennis courts, providing substantial screening, as discussed above. The structure will be fabricated in durable high quality materials. It is also designed to have minimal visual impact and blend in with the surroundings and 'countryside' location. This is mainly achieved by the choice of a light colour roof covering.

Respecting residential amenity

The scheme is also designed to respect neighbours' amenity and the club will carry out a full consultation with neighbours in advance of progressing any planning application.

The NPPF identifies that planning should seek to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. Similarly, Policy DP26 and DP29 of the MSDP and Policy 9 (bullet 6) of the Neighbourhood Plan require applicants to demonstrate that a proposal does not cause significant harm to the amenities of existing nearby residents and future occupants of new dwellings, including taking account of, for example, the impact on outlook, noise and light pollution.

The combination of the tree screening around courts 6 and 7, the separation distances to houses and the proposed light colour materials (so that the structure blends in to the background), ensure that neighbours will not suffer from loss of outlook or visual disturbance.

Turning to noise, courts 6 and 7 are well screened by trees that provide a buffer to the houses to the east and west. When buying a house near a tennis club, occupiers accept that there will be an element of noise. However, no additional noise from the resurfaced and covered courts is anticipated during play and it is anticipated that the roof will actually act as an acoustic buffer.

Although the roof will allow courts 6 and 7 to be used during all-weather, the maximum hours of use will be the same as existing (ie 8.30 am until 9 pm). Court use will increase during inclement weather compared to existing. However, during these times, neighbours are unlikely to be using their gardens and any additional disturbance would be negligible. Any increase in traffic to the site due to increased use of these two courts is also expected to be negligible.

In terms of light pollution, there are already floodlights in place which are turned off by 9pm. The proposal incorporates replacement LED floodlights under the new canopy which are carefully designed to minimise light spillage. The addition of a roof over these two courts will actually reduce any light spillage compared to existing. This is a benefit to the South Downs National Park, which is now an International Dark Sky Reserve.

To summarise, there will be no harm to neighbours' amenity and therefore no conflict with policies in the NPPF or development plan.

Protecting the trees and biodiversity

No loss of trees is envisaged with the proposal and the extent of the existing hardstanding nearest to the TPO trees is unlikely to change. If it does, any planning application will be supported by arboricultural and technical details justifying compliance with Policy DP37 (Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows). The screening of the floodlights should also benefit wildlife.

The proposal will continue to meet the Council's Strategic Objectives 3 (To protect valued landscapes for their visual, historical and biodiversity qualities) and 5 (To create and maintain easily accessible green infrastructure, green corridors and spaces around and within the towns and villages to act as wildlife corridors, sustainable transport links and leisure and recreational routes).

Conclusions

This pre-application enquiry is for a much needed sporting facility that complies with planning policy. The all-weather use of the two courts would be a clear benefit to the club, local community and tennis in general and this holds significant weight in the planning balance.

Although the site is designated as 'countryside', in reality it is seen as forming part of the built-up area of Hassocks and is surrounded on most sides by built development. A pragmatic approach therefore needs to be taken in relation to the locational planning policies. The surrounding built development, the existing tree screening and sensitive design of the structure will ensure that the rural landscape character is maintained, there is no coalescence with other settlements and the setting of the National Park (and associated views) is not harmed.

Any impact of the roof structure and associated additional usage of the courts would have a negligible impact on neighbours' amenity in terms of outlook, noise and light. Finally, the TPO trees and biodiversity will also be respected.

We look forward to attending a pre-application meeting (either on site or virtually) at the earliest opportunity. If you are able to carry out a site visit beforehand, this can easily be arranged.

As part of your pre-application advice, we are keen to understand the level of information and the documentation required to support a forthcoming planning application.

Please get in touch if you require any further information in advance of the meeting.

Yours faithfully



Helen Greenhalgh

Enc: Listed on page 1
cc: J de la Nougerède, Tennis Chairman, The Weald
J Greenyer, The Weald