

Agenda Item A15	Committee Date 2 November 2009	Application Number 09/00942/FUL
Application Site Halton Youth & Community Centre Low Road Halton Lancaster	Proposal Re-development of the recreation and play area	
Name of Applicant Halton With Aughton Parish Council	Name of Agent	
Decision Target Date 7 December 2009	Reason For Delay None	
Case Officer	Mrs Jennifer Rehman	
Departure	None	
Summary of Recommendation	Approve subject to conditions and request Delegation to the Head of Planning Services.	

Procedural Matters

The expiry date for the consultation period for this application is the 3 November 2009. Subsequently it is requested that the application be delegated to the Head of Planning Services to issue the decision after the Committee meeting on the 2 November 2009. The application has been referred to the Planning Committee as a matter of urgency so that the Parish Council does not lose funding that is currently available to them in order to implement their proposals.

1.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 1.1 The site that is the subject of this application relates to the existing Community Centre and playing fields within the settlement of Halton Village. The site is located north of Low Road between the allotment gardens to the west and residential dwellings on Lythe Fell Avenue to the east. To the north of the site a small area of protected woodland (Tree Preservation Order Number: 409 (2007)) separates the site from residential properties on High Road and Back High Road. South of the application site on the opposite side of the road is the Halton Mills development site, which is located at a lower level as the gradient falls towards to the River Lune. The topography of the site itself is relatively level, with the exception of the steeply rising embankment to the north and the existing tennis courts which have been constructed on a flat but elevated position.
- 1.2 At present the site comprises of the Community Hall, which is currently being extended and re-developed, a tennis court, a skate park and the playing field to the west. It is a clean and well maintained area of open space but is limited in its choice of facilities. The playing field in particular is exposed along the southern boundary of the site with limited screening fronting Low Road.
- 1.3 The site is directly accessed off Low Road with ample parking for vehicles within the confines of the site. The site is also accessible by public transport with the nearest bus stops located close to the junction with Lythe Fell Avenue and one opposite the site, servicing Halton village with nearby settlements and Lancaster.

- 1.4 The village and the application site are allocated on the Local Plan Proposals Map as part of the Countryside Area. It is also acknowledged that the site is bound by Halton Conservation Area to the north and west, but not located within it. Whilst not defined on the Proposals Map, the site clearly forms an important area public open space within the settlement and has been identified in the Open Space and Recreation Study (PPG17 Study).

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 Planning permission is sought for the redevelopment of the recreation and play areas surrounding Halton Community Centre. The development proposed encompasses several aspects to the development of the site including the provision of new outdoor play equipment and recreation areas and significant landscaping and re-grading works. The site shall be divided into 6 areas focusing on different elements of play and recreation to appeal to all age groups, abilities and interests. This includes an adventure play area; a young children's play area; a nature and wildlife zone; a meeting area; a skate park and multi-games area (MUGA); and a picnic area. It should be noted that the existing football pitch remains unaltered by the application and is not included within the red edge.
- 2.2 The most significant elements of the scheme involve the re-grading and landscaping of the site, the creation of the MUGA, a new skate park and the installation of some larger pieces of play equipment, such as the Giant Nest Swing with a height of 5.29m; an Octanet climbing frame at a height of 6m; and a flat seat and cradle swing with a height of 2.49m.
- 2.3 The re-grading involves excavation to lower the land levels by approximately 0.5m from the northern boundary of the site towards the car park. Land to the east of the existing football pitch, which shall accommodate the older children's playing area, shall be re-graded to create a raised mound approximately 2m higher (at its highest point) than the existing football pitch. The topography of the mound gradually lowers towards the land levels of the adjacent car park.
- 2.4 The MUGA shall be installed on the existing tennis court and shall be enclosed with the existing stop netting, albeit replaced like for like. The MUGA is a timber/metal framed construction with an artificial grass surface. The multi-goal areas located at either end of the court have a maximum height of 3.7m, which extends 7m in width. With the exception of the goal areas at either end, the MUGA enclosure consists of low timber fencing.
- 2.5 The proposed skate park replaces the existing stake park and consists of two irregular shaped sections with curved edges, extending into the east side embankment. The highest part of the replacement structure is 1.8m above the existing ground level of the tennis courts/stake park. This is on the elevation facing Halton Road and as a consequence it is proposed that this part of the structure shall be clad with natural stone.
- 2.6 The proposal involves the removal of a group of trees in the centre of the site, one of the northern embankment and the thinning of trees/shrubs on the eastern boundary, which results so far in the loss of 4 Grey Alders. Ten replacement trees and a significant amount of ground/shrub planting are proposed as part of the wider landscaping of the site.

3.0 Site History

- 3.1 The relevant planning history is listed in the box below:

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
05/00932/FUL	Temporary siting of container for storage of goalposts, nets and line-marking equipment	Permitted
07/00488/FUL	Creation of a recreation area and car park	Permitted
08/00308/FUL	Extension to the existing village hall to improve existing accommodation	Permitted and under implementation.
08/00773/FUL	Retrospective application for the temporary siting of a container for storage of equipment	Permitted
09/00143/FUL	Re-development of the recreation and play area	Withdrawn – insufficient information submitted.

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 No comments have been received from statutory consultees at the time of compiling this report. It should be noted however that during the determination of the previous application, which was later withdrawn, no objections were made to the principle of the development.

Statutory Consultee	Response
County Highways	Response not received at the time of compiling this report – comments will be reported verbally.
Lancashire Constabulary	Response not received at the time of compiling this report – comments will be reported verbally.
Environmental Health	Response not received at the time of compiling this report – comments will be reported verbally.
Tree Protection Officer	Proposed new landscaping in terms of location, numbers of plants and size of planting are all satisfactory. However further information is required relating to barrier fencing, method statements, replacement tree planting and a maintenance programme prior to determination. The outcome of this shall be reported verbally.
Access Officer	Response not received at the time of compiling this report – comments will be reported verbally.

5.0 Neighbour Representations

5.1 No representations received at the time of compiling this report – comments will be reported verbally.

6.0 Principal Development Plan Policies

6.1 The principal development plan policies considered most relevant to the submitted application include the following:

“Saved” Policies from the Lancaster District Local Plan:

Policy R4 (New Outdoor Playing Space) states that proposals to improve play space provision within the Carnforth and the villages will be encouraged provided that it would not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area or nearby residents.

Policy E4 (The Countryside Area) relates to new development within the countryside area stating that development will only be permitted where it is in scale and in keeping with the character of the landscape and is appropriate in terms of scale, siting, design and materials.

6.3 Policies of the Lancaster District Core Strategy LDF (adopted July 2008):

Policy SC8 (Recreation and Open Space) seeks to ensure existing sports facilities and green spaces are retained, protected and enhanced and that proposals for new recreational open space will maximise community involvement.

6.4 National Planning Policy

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation) encourages local authorities to seek opportunities to improve the value and promote better use of open spaces and sports and recreational facilities through the use of good design. Smaller scale facilities will be acceptable where they are located in, or adjacent to villages to meet the needs of the local community, provided that such development is designed and sited with great care and sensitivity to its rural location.

7.0 Comment and Analysis

7.1 Principle of the Development

The proposal forms part of a wider strategic scheme for upgrading and improving the provision of recreational facilities and open space within the village; a demand identified some time ago in the Halton Parish Plan. Improvements to the existing community centre, which were granted in 2008, are now well underway with a further permission granted to improve the car parking layout. The

transformation of the open space and playing facilities is the final phase in delivering a new and improved community resource.

The existing open space and recreational facilities are extremely limited and are in a poor state of repair. The open space has little to offer in terms of a community facility and as such is severely underused. The proposed development is innovative in terms of its layout, design and recreational choice. It offers a range of leisure and recreational activities for all age ranges, from nature trails located on the northern embankment, informal seating and picnic areas to a skate park and MUGA.

It is therefore considered that the principle of the development fully complies with national and local planning policies, which seek to retain, protect and enhance existing recreational facilities.

7.2 Amenity & Design

The proposed development has been sensitively designed in an innovative and attractive manner and should create a recreational facility the community will want to use. Notwithstanding this, the development will inevitably be visible from the highway and will slightly affect its open and rural character.

In order to create an interesting and attractive recreational space, alterations to the land levels have been proposed. The creation of the mound at the eastern end of the football pitch is proposed to add interest to the scheme and to bring the land levels from the existing football pitch gradually up to the level of the existing car parking area. This will mean the proposed play areas are visible from the surrounding area. Careful landscaping has been proposed to soften the visual impact of the development however a careful balance has to be made to ensure that the site offers a safe environment for people to use. The fact it is an open site allows for natural surveillance and hopefully minimises the risk of crime, in accordance with the principles of "secured by design".

The larger pieces of play equipment are generally lightweight in construction and despite their size will not adversely affect the appearance of the area. The application states that the Octanet cables to be in a natural 'hemp' colour opposed to a bright red for example. The MUGA and Stake Park are however more substantial forms of development and as a consequence, given their proximity to the adjacent highway and their elevated position, will be more prominent within the streetscene. The side of the MUGA facing the highway consists of a 7m wide 'goal' area which is 3.7m at its highest point. Similarly the Stake Park proposes a 1.8m high ramp facing the road, erected on the existing hard surfaced area, which is also slightly elevated from the road. It is proposed that this part of the ramp shall be clad in natural stone to avoid the skate ramp appearing out of context with the rural character of the area. It should be noted that there is a similar situation as existing, which is extremely untidy when viewed from the road. The MUGA is less of a problem as it is constructed in timber.

As noted in section 1.0 of this report, the site is adjacent to the Conservation Area. In this instance the proposed development is located some distance from any significant townscape or heritage assets and it is separated from properties on High Road by the adjacent protected woodland. Despite the scale of some elements of the scheme, the development is unlikely to adversely affect the visual amenities of the area or affect views into and across the Conservation Area, particularly given the extent of new landscaping, to warrant significant concern in context with policy E4 (Countryside Area).

7.3 Trees

The woodland which runs along the northern boundary of the site is protected by Tree Preservation Order No. 409 (2007). The woodland also forms part of the Conservation Area. It is on a sloping site separating the playing fields from properties on High Road. The woodland, which is made up with predominantly sycamore species offers important green vistas across the site and therefore warrants sufficient protection.

The re-grading of the land, excavation and the creation of the mound are the elements of the scheme which potentially have the greatest threat on the protected trees and their root systems. The submitted arboricultural implication assessment details a small group of trees (not protected) in the centre of the site which are to be removed in order to facilitate the development. Replacement planting has been proposed amounting to 10 new trees and a significant increase in ground/shrub

planting in and around the play equipment and the MUGA. The report also details one large protected sycamore to be removed from the embankment due to severe arboricultural defects, and the removal of 4 Grey Alders from group G2 at the entrance to the site. Officers are still in negotiations with the applicant with regards to further replacement planting and clarification over the thinning of certain groups of trees. Further details have also been requested to establish the appropriate levels of protection for the retained trees. The outcome of these negotiations and clarification over the exact number of trees to be removed shall be verbally reported.

Notwithstanding this, the loss of trees within the site can be sufficiently mitigated through an appropriate replacement planting and landscaping scheme.

7.4 Access

The site offers a range of play areas and equipment which shall be accessible for able and disabled people. Surfacing comprises grassed areas, recycled loose-fill mulch surfacing, boarded walkways and typical hard surfacing. This shall provide suitable contrasts in colours and materials to assist partially sighted people. Level access is available to both play areas. The project shall also be enhanced with lighting that will have commonality with the existing link paths from the site to nearby residential areas. Exact details of the lighting can be controlled by condition should Members support the proposals.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 The proposed development will have an impact on the visual amenities of the location by virtue of the open character of the site, the proposed re-grading work and pieces of larger new play equipment. On balance however, the development will be a significant improvement to what currently exists and will offer a greater variety of recreational activities. All of which has been designed in an innovative manner involving significant landscaping and planting proposals.

8.2 The Parish Council have been successful in gaining sufficient funding to implement their existing permissions to renovate and extend the community centre. Their aspirations to complete the regeneration of the site by improving the open space and recreational facilities is a proposal Members can support.

Recommendation

That the Committee **support the principle of development** with a final decision delegated to the Head of Planning Services subject to the receipt of consultation responses, and that the following conditions be attached to any decision.

1. Standard Time Condition
2. In accordance with the approved plans
3. Standard landscaping condition
4. Tree Protection Condition (barrier fencing)
5. Replacement Tree Planting condition (subject to further negotiations)
6. Details of lighting
7. Details of all new boundary treatments and enclosure (materials and colour of fencing)
8. Details of viewing terrace at Skateboard Park

Human Rights Act

This recommendation has been reached after consideration of the provisions of The Human Rights Act. Unless otherwise stated in this report, the issues arising do not appear to be of such magnitude to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

Background Papers

1. None