



Bridge Farm,
Sarn, Nr Malpas,
Cheshire, SY14 7LN
Telephone/Fax 01948 770620

6th July 2009

Chief Planning Officer
Wrexham CBC
Lampit Street
Wrexham
LL11 1AR

Fao: Charlotte Beattie

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: P/2009/0499 – Retrospective planning application for a parents covered seating area at Colliers Park, Chester Road, Gresford.

We are instructed by Wrexham Football Club in relation to their application, as described above. The purpose of this letter is to provide justification for the application and, in particular, to respond to the points raised in your letter dated 18th June.

The first point we make is that the application is for permanent permission for the retention of the covered seating area. Whilst it is, indeed, capable of being moved, it is secured to a concrete base and is intended to remain in place on a permanent basis.

You have asked that we address the reasons for refusal that arose in relation to application P/2007/0991:

The second and third reasons for refusal both relate to traffic related matters and, it appears to us, arise out of a misunderstanding as to the nature of the manner in which the spectator stand is to be used. The spectator stand has not been erected in relation to any recent or intended expansion of activities. As you will be aware, a key role for many senior football clubs is to engage in junior football coaching and player development, not only in order for them to play a full part in their local community, but also to provide a pool of talented young players from whom future first team players can hopefully be drawn. Therefore, since Colliers Park was established in the early 1990's the Club has been heavily involved in junior football development.

Many of the younger footballers are brought to the site by their parents who then remain on site and enjoy watching the sessions in which their children are taking part. You will obviously appreciate that many of these sessions take place in cold or wet conditions – whatever the time of year – and the reason behind the stand is to provide some shelter to the parents from the elements (on which we comment further below). However, in this context

you will be able to appreciate that the proposal is not related to any expansion of activities or the numbers of children involved; it, therefore, does not involve any additional traffic. Indeed, to the contrary, the availability of a shelter from the elements is more likely to encourage parents to remain on site for the duration of the sessions rather than to return home or go elsewhere and, consequently, if anything, it is likely to result in a small reduction in overall traffic movements.

It is to some extent helpful that this application is retrospective. The covered seating area for parents has been in place for approximately two years, during that time we are not aware of any incidents that might suggest that there has been any increase in parking within the highway or other dangers to road users by virtue of increased use of the existing access – this is surely a practical demonstration of the fact that the proposal is not associated with additional vehicle flow to and from the site.

Therefore, to return to the two vehicle related reasons for refusal, the proposal does not involve any additional vehicle movements or any consequent increase in parking movements and, therefore, we trust you will agree that the previous reasons for refusal numbered '2' and '3' were based on a misunderstanding of the nature of the proposal and they are not justified.

The key issue in this case relates to the impact of the stand on the openness of the green barrier having regard to relevant policy. We set out our analysis of relevant policy as follows:

It is acknowledged that the site is within the green barrier where, in accordance with PPW, paragraphs 2.6.14 and 15, there is a presumption against inappropriate development except in very exceptional circumstances.

Paragraph 2.6.16, however, identifies a number of forms of development that are not considered to be inappropriate. These include *“essential facilities for outdoor sport....which maintain the openness of the Green Belt or green wedge and which do not conflict with the purpose of including land within it”*. In the context of the approved recreational use of the application site, we consider the spectator stand to be an essential facility; it is necessary to provide shelter from adverse weather conditions for parents and it is, frankly, unreasonable to suggest that they should be expected to endure poor weather conditions without some form of shelter from where they can watch their children (the existing main building on the site is too far removed from the pitch and has no external viewing facility to be considered an alternative). In order to promote children's football it is essential that reasonable accommodation is provided for parents, otherwise, parents will be significantly more reluctant to come along and children's participation will consequently suffer. It is necessary to demonstrate that development that is not inappropriate will also maintain the openness of the green barrier, we deal with this in greater detail below, but, suffice it to say at this stage, that in our view a consideration of the impact of this structure on the openness of the green barrier, taken in the appropriate context, demonstrates that the structure has no materially detrimental impact. On this basis the proposal should be viewed as an appropriate form of development within the green barrier for which planning permission should be granted.

Without prejudice to the above, were you to consider the proposal to be inappropriate development, then this would still not justify refusal. Paragraph 2.6.15. of PPW makes clear that inappropriate development can be granted in very exceptional circumstances. In this instance, the very exceptional circumstances are as follows:

- We would also refer to Policy EC1 of the Wrexham UDP. Fundamentally, this reflects National policy which is referred to above and it is not, therefore, repeated. However, the explanation of the Policy at paragraph 5.2 is particularly significant in that it states that: *“Predominantly urban uses involving substantial built development or night time lighting are not considered suitable uses in a green barrier”*. By no stretch of the imagination can the seating area be regarded as “substantial built development”, on any basis it is a small structure and especially so in the context of the existing development on the site and on adjacent sites. The proposal is not one, therefore, that your own policy explanation would appear to indicate is unacceptable.

The first reason for the refusal of the earlier application indicated that the spectator stand would conflict with the open character of the site, it is this specific claim that we now consider:

When travelling along the Chester Road in the vicinity of the application site, the key characteristic of the site is the mature hedgeline along the road frontage which screens activities beyond to a very significant degree. Indeed, the neighbouring developments of The Beeches public house and its associated Premier Inn, together with the Ashgrove Care Home on the opposite side of the road are much more significant developments with a consequently greater impact on the openness of the green barrier on which we comment further below.

The following photograph is taken from a position immediately opposite the spectator stand on Chester Road with the precise position adjusted to get the best view of the seating area.



View directly towards the covered seating area from Chester Road.

Whilst the seating area is just discernible to the human eye, it is entirely screened in the photograph by the deep woodland planting along the boundary in this location. Generally, however, as described above, it is the peripheral mature hedgeline which screens the site:



View north along Chester Road, along Colliers Park road frontage.

It is only at the entrance to the site that there is any significant view of anything on the site, from this



Covered seating area glimpsed through site entrance.

point the seating area can be seen over a maximum distance of approximately 7 metres when travelling in a southerly direction (and not at all when travelling in the opposite

driveway and the wire netting fencing point to there being something else on the site as well. The seating area is situated approximately 150 metres from the entrance, it is clad in dark green sheeting which merges into the wooded background. Whilst, as the photograph demonstrates, the stand can only be seen over an extremely short distance on Chester Road, it is not a significant element in the landscape of the area and we doubt whether any casual passer-by would even be aware of its presence. On this basis, we conclude that it has no material impact on the openness of the green barrier.

Without prejudice to the above analysis, it is necessary to put any analysis of the impact of the spectator stand in the proper context. In this regard, it is important to note that the covered seating area is one small element on a large developed site. Notwithstanding the original officer's recommendation that planning permission should be refused, Members granted permission in 1993 and, therefore, it must be the Council's position that the permitted development of the site is not of material detriment to the openness of the green barrier. A Planning Inspector, of course, subsequently granted permission on appeal including additional car parking which he also considered not to be of material detriment to the green barrier. The seating area needs to be viewed in this context, a large area of playing fields, with a floodlit and fenced main practice pitch, together with car parking areas, a large building and a smaller implement shed are not considered to be of detriment to the green barrier, therefore, there is no basis for considering the retention of the covered seating area to be of material detriment in this context having regard to the analysis of its visual impact set out above.

Indeed, we take the consideration of context further. We have previously referred to the neighbouring developments which are far more significant built developments within the 'open' area between Wrexham and Gresford. The Beeches is clearly a long-established property, however, the



Beeches.

Premier Inn at The

Premier Inn within its grounds is a much more recent development which cannot be concluded on any basis to be anything other than a far more significant development in green barrier terms than is the spectator stand. Similarly, whilst the Ashgrove Care Home is undoubtedly based on a long-established property, it has been extended to a significant degree.



Ashgrove Care Home extensions.

Whilst we have not at this stage examined the history of these two sites in detail, it does seem to us that both have been developed since planning permission was originally granted for the Applicants training ground. The scale of development on both of these sites adds significantly to the argument that the spectator stand is of no material significance in terms of impact on openness of the green barrier, but perhaps more significantly, it would simply be illogical to conclude that these two additions were acceptable within a green barrier context whilst the covered seating area was not – and yet this would appear to be the logic that would have to underpin any refusal.

For all of the above reasons, we hope you will conclude that the retention of the covered seating area for parents involves development which is of no material significance in the context of the openness of the green barrier when regard is had to the scale of the development on the training ground site at present and in the immediate area. Policy seeks to strictly control development in green barrier areas, but it does not preclude it. This development is for a type of development that should be viewed as 'not inappropriate' in the green barrier, but even if this proposition is not accepted, then it is clear that there are very special circumstances that justify the retention of the seating area in the context of the existing use of the site.

Yours faithfully

M GILBERT