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Ashfield District Council Local Plan 2023 to 2040

Hearing Statement Prepared by Sport England (Respondent Id 698)

Matter 10 – Site Allocations – H1Sq – Hardwick Lane recreation ground, Sutton-In-Ashfield

Question 10.60 – What evidence is there that the site is no longer needed for open space?

Question 10.61 – Is the allocation justified?

1. Sport England raised an objection to Local Plan Policy H1 on the grounds that the allocation of site H1Sq – Hardwick Lane recreation ground is not consistent with paragraph 103 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023).
2. Sport England does not consider that there is evidence that the site is no longer needed as a playing field. The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (2023) (PPS) identifies shortfalls in the provision of youth 11v11 and youth 9v9 football pitches. While this site has been identified as a lapsed site in the PPS the site could be brought back into use to meet current or future need for playing pitch provision. The Hardwick Lane recreation ground could accommodate a youth 11v11 or youth 9v9 football pitch.
3. Paragraph 103 of the NPPF requires that sport and recreational buildings and land, including playing field, should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which clearly shows the buildings or land to be surplus to requirements or the loss is proposed to be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location. Neither Policy H1 nor the supporting text address these requirements.
4. Sport England notes that planning permission has been granted for the development of this site through planning application reference V/2024/0063. Sport England objected to this application because the

application was not considered to accord with any of the exceptions to our Playing Fields Policy or paragraph 103 of the NPPF.

5. Through the planning application a financial contribution was secured through a Unilateral Undertaking to be used towards improvements to existing playing pitch provision and general open space provision at Sutton Lawn. However, Sport England does not consider that this meets Exception 4 of our playing fields policy or paragraph 103 of the NPPF as the contribution does not address the need for replacement provision to be equivalent or better in terms of quantity and quality.
6. While planning permission has been granted, this consent could lapse. If the site is allocated in the Local Plan this allocation would remain in place. We therefore consider that the matter of ensuring that Policy H1 is consistent with paragraph 103 of the NPPF still needs to be addressed.

Conclusion

7. Sport England considers that a modification is required to Policy H1 and/ or the supporting text to ensure that any future development proposals for the site meet the requirements of paragraph 103 of the NPPF either thorough providing an up-to-date assessment which demonstrates that the playing field is surplus to requirements or through the provision of a replacement area of playing field which is equivalent or better in terms of quantity and quality and in a suitable location.
8. Sport England would be happy to work with the Council to agree potential modifications to the Plan to address this matter.

Please note that the NPPF references to paragraph 103 in this statement refer to the 2023 version of the NPPF to provide consistency with our comments made at Regulation 19 stage. In the December 2024 version of the NPPF this is paragraph 104.