

KEY ISSUE THREE: JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RELEASE OF WILLIAM PITT FIELD FOR HOUSING RE-DEVELOPMENT

The sports pitches at William Pitt Field (Site 6) are proposed to be relocated to Site 1 to enable Site 6 to be re-developed for housing.

There is a lack of justification for their relocation particularly given their proximity to housing Sites 5 and 7.

William Pitt field is 1.733 hectares in extent and is owned by Lenham Parish Council. The Field currently contains football pitches used by village teams, one senior and one junior. The field has very limited changing facilities and is considered too small to support the additional population arising from 1000 dwellings. At an average household size of 2.38 the 1000 dwellings would generate an additional population of 2380 extra people. The requirement for sports pitches set out in MBLP Policy DM19 is 1.6 ha per 1000 population. The expanded population would therefore require an additional 3.8 hectares of publicly accessible outdoor sports provision.

The Parish Council considers the existing provision within the village sufficiently meets the needs of the existing population, together with that which will arise from the construction of the 364 committed dwellings.

Site 1 is 11.594 hectares in extent. The residential allocation on Site 1 is 3.8 hectares in extent. The balance of Site 1 is 7.794 hectares.

The Plan proposes a scheme of open space within Site 1 which will include:

1. a play area of 0.25 ha;
2. an area for a sports pavilion and car park of 0.45 ha;
3. one full sized grass soccer pitch.

Elements 1. to 3. will be provided after the construction of approximately half the houses in Site 1. It is proposed that this facility could be transferred to Lenham Parish Council. The planning judgement of the Parish Council is that elements 1. to 3. are directly related and meet the needs of the development proposed on Site 1.

It is also proposed that a further area of land which could provide for further pitches could be transferred to the Parish Council. This land is currently owned by a local farming family with close associations with the parish of Lenham, extending over many generations. The Parish Council considers that the further area would be a more than acceptable replacement for the sports pitch facility currently located at William Pitt Field.

One possible indicative layout for Site 1 is shown in the Lenham Masterplanning Report (25th October 2019). The layout shows an outdoor sports area of 3.63 hectares within the non-residential balance of Site (7.794 hectares). The open space on Site 1 is connected to the centre of the village by a footpath. Another footpath lies to the south and currently traverses the area shown on the indicative layout as occupied by the southerly most of the three sports pitches shown.

The Parish Council considers that the provision of a new area of sports pitches comprising 3.63 hectares, adjacent to an area of natural and semi-natural open space of a further 3.67 hectares will more than replace the 1.733 hectare facility currently provided at William Pitt Field. The Parish Council considers the replacement sports facility serving the village would be a significant benefit arising from the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The consultation exercises undertaken in association with the Plan indicates public support for the proposal.

The consultation on the 2017 Plan is reported in the Consultation Statement at page 14. There was overwhelming support for the new sports facilities.

The all-weather pitch and potential flood lighting referred to on page 14 relates to a potential enhancement of the facility at a later stage, depending on financial support, and is not a proposal contained in the 2019 Plan.

The consultation on the 2018 Plan is reported in the Consultation Statement at page 22. Under the 'How did we do?' section 46 respondents regarded the footpath sports proposals as 'Good', 35 respondents as 'OK' and with only 2 respondents regarding it as 'Poor'.

Site 5 lies immediately to the south and west of William Pitt Field. Site 5 is to provide at least 6.6 hectares of open space to incorporate:

1. at least 0.5 ha of allotments;
2. at least 0.5 ha of amenity green space and play provision;
3. not less than 1.05 ha of playing pitches for outdoor sport and recreation.

The provision of not less than 1.05 hectares of playing pitches within Site 5 is broadly proportionate to the need for such a facility arising from the construction of 360 dwellings.

The Parish Council considers that the eventual distribution of open spaces across Area 1 the North East of Lenham Village Extension, together with Area 3 North West of Lenham Village Extension will provide an excellent distribution of recreational facilities to serve the expanded village.

A full planning application for the construction of 53 dwellings on Site 7 (18/506657/FULL) was granted planning permission on 30th August 2019. The application was reported to Planning Committee on 30th May 2019. The summary of the reasons for the positive recommendation in relation to the application contains the following paragraphs:

- ***“The proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of the impact on the character of the area, the adjacent countryside, the landscape setting of the AONB, highway safety and parking, neighbouring amenity, ecology, arboriculture and drainage;***
- ***Under Policy SP8 of the MBLP, Lenham is to provide additional housing growth and it has been designated as a Rural Service Centre and a broad Location for future housing development if the Local Plan to be delivered between 2021 and 2031;***
- ***The policy states that future housing sites should be allocated and determined by a Neighbourhood Plan and master plan process, by April 2021 in accordance with the criteria of policy H2(3). However, the Lenham Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) has encountered delays and can no longer be agreed in time to allow it to facilitate a realistic and desirable housing trajectory over the 2021 to 2031 period;***
- ***The site will be able to meet approx. 5% of future requirements for the settlement. The development will be self contained functionally and visually. The form and layout do not prejudice acceptable development in principle coming forward on neighbouring sites. The site is not dependent on any of the other earmarked sites in the draft LNP.”***

The Parish Council considers that similar planning considerations apply to William Pitt Field, as apply to Site 7, which is immediately adjoining to the north.

In view of all the reasons given above, the Parish Council considers that the distribution of uses proposed in the Plan, including the release of William Pitt Field to meet essential housing needs, is fully justified.

The relocation site for the pitches is indeed bisected by PROW KH399A. The Parish Council propose that this can either be addressed by securing a footpath diversion or, failing that, by leaving the footpath in situ and securing a layout of sports pitches which accommodates the existing line of the footpath. One way that this could be achieved would be by the provision of two junior pitches bisected by the footpath in substitution for the one larger pitch currently shown on the illustrative plan. The Parish Council believes this is a matter of detail which can properly be addressed at a later stage in the process. The precise layout of the pitches can be satisfactorily dealt with by the the submission of material for approval subject to a condition or a reserved matter. The Parish Council has been in consultation with Sports England on the evolution of these proposals. It would be appropriate to consult further with Sports England on the detail at an appropriate stage in the planning application process. It appears that the replacement of the pitches by a larger more comprehensive sports scheme would meet with Sports England criteria.