



### **North St Albans housing allocation Implications and proposals for Old Albanian Sports Association**

**Notes of meeting 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Present:

Mike Fisher, Trustee and Operations Board, Old Albanian Sports Association (MF)

Ian Haywood, Operations Board, Old Albanian Sports Association (IH)

Roy Warren, Sport England (RW)

Ian Moore, England and Wales Cricket Board (IM)

Dominic Chatfield, Hertfordshire Cricket Board (DC)

Kieran Spencer, Rugby Football Union (KS)

Iain MacSween, Hallam Land (IM)

Ed Saunders, St Albans School Woollam Trust (ES)

David O'Neil, Nortoft (DO'N)

Sue O'Neil, Nortoft (SO'N)

#### **Introduction to the project**

##### North St Albans housing allocation

The area of playing fields leased and used by the OASA south of the current access road is identified for housing in the Regulation 18 stage of the St Albans Local Plan, as part of a wider proposed allocation. The Reg 18 allocation is similar to the previously Submitted Local Plan, which was withdrawn from Examination in 2020.

The Reg 18 version of the allocation fails to identify how the OASA playing field area will be replaced, and this need has been covered in the Representations on the Reg 18 by Hallam Land. Sport England has raised the same issue.

The purpose of the meeting is therefore to agree appropriate re-provision for OASA.

The application timescales for the North St Albans allocation are still somewhat uncertain, but it is hoped that all of the supporting work can be completed by June 2024.

The application is intended to be Detailed for the playing field element, and Outline for the housing development. This will enable appropriate phasing of the project, including the necessary time for the establishment of the pitches prior to use.

## Sport England

Roy Warren has a meeting with Chris Briggs at SADC in early February where he will be raising both the need for the re-provision of the playing field area, and the District-wide need for new playing field space to meet the needs of new housing, whether integrated into the developments or provided elsewhere.

RW also commented that Sport England did not support the development of stand-alone single pitch sites for football or rugby.

Sport England advised that the new Playing Pitch Strategy requires a fuller refresh in order to be more robust. However, a key issue of concern to Sport England is the general lack of football playing field space in the district.

## Old Albanian Sports Association

MF and IH are working closely with the OASA's constituent clubs, and the proposals have the full support of OARFC and OACC. The OASA currently benefits from the use of the site as the training venue for Saracens Rugby Club, but when they leave the site once their own training facilities are built, then OASA will be fully reliant on funds it can generate from community and any other compatible commercial use. The OASA pavilion is the 'hub' of the sports site and provides the social space for both rugby and cricket. However, it is an expensive building to run and maintain. It is essential for the OASA to avoid having a second social/bar space in any new separate pavilion as this would incur high running costs.

The OASA and its constituent clubs have discussed and agreed that the indicative proposals meet their needs.

The OARFC currently has; around 800 mini and junior members, a growing girls section, a senior women's team, and 3.5 men's teams. In order to help meet the junior demand, the club will have a rolling 2-year lease arrangement with the school to use some of the school's pitches on Sundays for juniors (this is currently annual).

The OARFC staggers its programme on Sundays in order to accommodate the large numbers, with minis starting early, the junior boys mid-morning, junior girls around lunchtime, and women in the afternoon.

The OACC has 4 men's teams and a growing junior game. The proposals meet the Hertfordshire Cricket Saracens Cricket League requirements.

Car parking can be a significant issue at peak time, particularly in the winter, and this scheme seeks to help address the problem.

The Saracens Rugby club are expected move off site in June 2025.

## St Albans School Woollam Trust (“Woollam Trust”/“Tust”)

The Woollam Trust is the landowner and leases the OASA site to them on a 250 year lease, of which about 239 years remain. The proposed replacement area of playing field would be provided to the OASA on a conterminous lease with the same terms.

### Pavilion and playing field tour

MF and IH led a tour around the pavilion and playing field areas (see plans attached).

### **Discussion key points from the site visit and follow-up session**

The proposed plan for the replacement area was agreed as appropriate, subject to a detailed plan by TGMS, including clarification on drainage treatment.

Both the proposed residential development and the new pitches are currently in the Green Belt, and irrespective of the residential portion of the scheme, the new pitches are likely to remain so. The proposed pavilion annex should therefore be fully justified as required ancillary accommodation for the sports pitches, and should reference the existing OASA pavilion offer, including the 10 changing rooms and extensive bar, professional kitchen and social space.

RW emphasised that each element of the pavilion annex accommodation would need to be fully justified to meet the Green Belt policies, and that SADC would seek the minimum provision within the Green Belt to minimise the impact on openness. Examples to review include: football pavilion at Wheathampstead, and a pavilion proposal at Rothamsted.

KS confirmed that the proposed pavilion annex would not meet RFU specifications, and as such should not be considered as a rugby facility (beyond toilet provision) within the planning application. In line with the intended rugby usage proposed by OASA, the RFU are content that the existing provision is within reasonable distance from the new pitch location.

The detailed schedule of accommodation for the proposed pavilion annex was agreed to be circulated to the group for initial informal comment, in order to inform the draft pavilion design. This will include:

- 2 x team changing including showers to ECB specifications
- Provision for match officials to ECB specifications
- Toilet facilities
- Small lobby/waiting area (sufficient space for 2 x cricket teams to shelter during bad weather)
- Kitchenette with hot drink preparation and fridge
- Covered veranda from where the batting team can spectate and wait to bat
- Storage space for stumps, scoreboards and kit.

A technical pitch Performance Quality Assessment for the existing playing field area needs to be submitted as part of the baseline evidence.

A full pitch feasibility report with design for the new playing field area should be submitted as part of the application. It was noted that TGMS has already been engaged, and their involvement was supported by Sport England and the NGBs.

The pitch feasibility report should show the potential alternative layouts which could be provided on the new site for mini and junior rugby, whilst protecting the cricket square.

The south east corner of the proposed playing field area next to the wildlife corridor should have a soft edge where it is closest to the pitch. This should be achieved by setting back the security fence at this pinch point (subject to ecologist advice).

RW stated that the proposed new lease for the proposed pitch area to OASA will need to be linked to a Planning Condition or S106, and at minimum the Heads of Terms should be submitted with the application.

The phasing of the new pitch provision will need confirmation as part of the application, to ensure appropriate grow-in time. No loss of pitch or playing field use can occur ahead of the replacement area of playing field being confirmed as ready for sports use. This point is accommodated within the proposed new lease.

Sport England would wish to see a masterplan for the whole of the North St Albans development.

Ball strike, noise and other assessments should be undertaken ahead of the application and preferably shared as part of the pre-application discussions, to demonstrate issues with the interface between the residential use and sport have been fully assessed, and if necessary the mitigation which would be put into place.

A non-turf pitch on the replacement Cricket 2 was supported by ECB, and it was agreed that this should be located as part of the cricket square. This would maximise the flexibility of the area for marking out of different sized rugby pitches.

The drainage strategy for the pitches will be confirmed and shown on the plans.