

Our Ref: 24181/MS/gc
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10 June 2024

Josh Parker
Planning Department
River Park House
225 High Road
London
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Dear Josh,

RESPONSE TO APPLICATION REFERENCE: HGY/2024/0871

We have been instructed by our client, Fortis Green Tennis Club, to submit the enclosed response to planning application ref: HGY/2024/0871, which seeks permission for the following development:

“Demolition of the existing clubhouse and redevelopment of the site to provide a detached three storey block containing a new clubhouse with apartments above and a terrace of houses, one new tennis court, refurbishment of two of the existing tennis courts, creation of a vehicular access off Cherry Tree Road, with associated landscaping, car parking, cycle storage, and refuse storage”

The club has always been and continues to be open to discussion with the Club's landlords, the United Reform Church, on ways to meet their financial objectives while maintaining the integrity of the club as a sports facility and community asset. Despite lengthy discussions so far, the URC and the developers have chosen to submit the scheme without addressing any of the club's serious concerns. The present proposals cannot be supported but the club is ready to further engage and discuss any alternative proposals.

The tennis club shares many of the concerns expressed by others about the dramatic change to an open and green space benefiting the local community, with all possible repercussions to wildlife, water drainage, trees, traffic, quality of life, etc. However, in its own submission, the club concentrates on the impact on its tennis facilities.

The application essentially seeks to intensify the site and provide residential uses alongside some revamped tennis facilities. The proposals as currently presented would result in the loss of a tennis court, the creation of new tennis courts smaller than the club's current larger courts, more cramped surrounds and the complete loss of external coaching, children's play space and socialising areas. Despite the provision of a larger clubhouse, which is not a club requirement, this would result in a significant worsening of conditions for the tennis club and for its members.

This submission outlines the club's reservations with the current scheme, as well as highlighting inaccuracies within the applicant's submission – particularly where they have understated the club's occupancy levels as well as the quality of existing facilities at the site to justify their loss.

The concerns with the current proposals are detailed below.

Negative Impact on the existing tennis club facilities

The key, overriding concern with the application is that it would result in a deterioration of facilities for the tennis club. The applicant has within its submission provided inaccurate and misleading information about the state of the club, seeking to justify the development on the basis that there are 'poor' existing facilities at the club which are in need of upgrading. This is, however, wholly inaccurate, as the tennis club has good-quality courts, is a hugely popular facility within the local community and is currently thriving. Membership is growing, the children and youth coaching programme is expanding, and the playing facilities are used throughout the year.

The club is run by members, with the club providing competitive leagues, social sessions, and coaching classes for members of all abilities. Full details of the club and its membership details, coaching programmes etc. can be found on their official website fortisgreentennis.com, however one of their key functions is its children/youth coaching programme, which is managed in partnership with local schools and aligns with the LTA Youth Programme. The club is profitable, with finances used to maintain and resurface the courts every year - so it is certainly not in a poor state of repair. Annual fees are comparatively low (adult fee £160 p.a.), making the club accessible for the whole surrounding community.

Members therefore wanted to clarify the following inaccuracies within the developer's submission:

- A surface condition report from Sovereign Sports has been provided as part of the applicant's submission. This is dated 22 March 2024; however, it is based on a visit in the summer of 2019, the purpose of which was to quote for new courts. Other contractors visited as well. Sovereign Sports are now the chosen contractor; therefore they are not an independent assessor, they have a vested interest in the project and their report should be seen in this light. Photographs, primarily taken after the Covid closure, have been selected to show the club facilities in the worst possible light. Since they were taken, the courts have been consistently well maintained and upgraded. The club imports four tonnes of top-quality clay each year to spread on the courts and renew the playing surfaces, which are used all year round. Photographs of the existing surface, that accurately portray the condition of the courts, are provided in support of this letter at Appendix 1. We would also encourage the Council to visit the site and view the premises themselves. We are sure they will similarly reach the view that the courts are in fine condition, and the club is functioning well and providing a valuable community function.
- The applicant has included a Needs Assessment by Sports Planning Consultants in support of their application, which provides commentary on the status of the existing courts and appears to be a concerted effort to justify the loss of one court through presenting a depiction of FGTC as a club in decline. This, again, is not accurate as members use and enjoy the courts all year round. There are regular social events at the club. The flourishing LTA-registered children/youth programme already includes more than 60 children and has potential to grow further. There are no issues retaining members or attracting new members to the club, so the club is not in decline. It is thriving, and reducing the number of courts would limit growth by putting strain on the facilities and restricting availability for members.
- Within its submission, the applicant has justified the loss of a tennis court on the basis that they will be replacing the 4 clay courts with 3 all-weather courts, implying they will be more resistant to winter weather and as a result used more frequently throughout the year. This is very questionable, as the clay courts in their current form are usable throughout the year, and are only unavailable after very heavy rain or frosts, which is exactly how all-weather courts would also operate. Without floodlights, the benefits of all-weather courts are much reduced, so there wouldn't be any greater use throughout the winter months, rather there would simply be fewer courts to deal with the existing demand. Furthermore, it should be said that the clay courts are a very unique feature, with the club being one of the very few clay court clubs in north London. There is an acute demand for clay courts across the country, so to replace them with all-weather courts should not be justified, nor should reducing the overall provision.

- It is stated within the applicant's submission that the 'new courts will be larger and closer to meeting LTA guidelines (which they currently do not)', however again, this simply is not true. The proposed scheme will result in the total number of courts being reduced from four to three (a severe reduction in playing facilities), but it also eliminates the two larger courts to the south of the site, with these intended to be replaced with housing. As a result, all 3 replacement courts would be smaller than the existing 2 southern courts, and would all fail to meet LTA minimum space standards. A comparison of the current and proposed tennis court sizes is provided in the table at Appendix 2. The fixed site dimensions prevent the current courts achieving minimum width and this will not change with the new courts (rather they will get narrower), so the criticism that the courts do not meet LTA standards is very misleading. Reducing the size of the courts further will however impact the function of the tennis and deter competitive matches/leagues etc., so it cannot reasonably be assumed that this would be an enhancement of the existing facilities.
- The developers have suggested that they will be enhancing the clubhouse facilities implying the existing clubhouse is in a deteriorating condition. However, there are no issues with the functionality of the existing clubhouse. Despite being somewhat dated, it includes ample space for members to congregate and features a functional open plan layout with a small kitchen and two changing rooms. It serves its purpose, and importantly offers uninterrupted views to all four courts, important in terms of safeguarding. Replacing this with a new clubhouse on the ground floor of a residential block, with no direct views to all of the courts, would not be an enhancement of the facilities, it would be a worsening, and would result in a more cramped design. Although the new clubhouse will be bigger, due to the footprint needed for the flats, its orientation is such that it will be darker and unwelcoming. The applicant has not included any additional features to enhance the clubhouse, such as disabled facilities or showers, rather they have done the bare minimum, pushing the clubhouse to a constrained section of the site beneath a residential block.
- In this context, it should also be noted that the proposed residential block will be right on top of two tennis courts, with no space between the residents and the playing areas. It seems inevitable that the sound of tennis games right outside residents' windows all day and into the evening would lead to friction and most likely demands for playing hours to be reduced.
- The most important point to flag in relation to social/amenity facilities is that the scheme does not include any form of replacement provision for the external green space in the centre of the site. This currently forms a hub of activity for the club, with the grass area used as an area for parents to congregate and watch children being coached, a space for children to play whilst their siblings are undertaking lessons, somewhere for coaching to take place before entering the courts, and generally as the main area where social activity takes place at the club. A photograph of this external space in use during a family barbeque day is provided at Appendix 3. To completely lose this open, green space, with its rich natural habitat, without any replacement provision, would hugely impact on the social functioning of the club and make it far less attractive to members. It would particularly affect the youth coaching programme. The site already features very constrained borders with limited outdoor space, so to eliminate the only open section of the site with no replacement provision and push all social activities to an impractical clubhouse below a residential block would be hugely detrimental to the functionality of the site, and would result in a depressing environment whereby members are unlikely to wish to spend time at the club.
- A further important issue which arises from the proposed plan relates to safeguarding issues for the children, some of them very young, who attend coaching at the club. Right now, the club is an entirely enclosed space with one narrow path as its entry point. This makes it a very safe environment for children. Under the proposed plan the courts where children play would be easily visible from the proposed new road entrance at Cherry Tree Road. Furthermore, the residents of the proposed residential block would look straight down on courts used by infants and small children. The Club considers this another safeguarding risk.

- It is ascertained at several points that there has been a lack of investment into the club. This is not true; the club invests significantly into its clay courts, resurfaced every year at a considerable cost. The lack of investment in other areas in recent years is not linked to the finances of the club, it is a result of the current uncertainty surrounding the club's future, with the landowners refusing to grant a new long lease since 2016 and therefore deterring investment. Development discussions since 2019 have made matters worse in this respect. The club does however have finances and ambitions to keep growing membership and invest further through step-by-step improvement of facilities, and would seek to do this should their long term occupancy of the site be secured.
- The applicant mentions a new long-term lease for the club to support the application. The club wishes to state that it has been requesting a full draft of this lease, with all its provisions and not just headline claims, for at least two years but nothing has been forthcoming.
- The applicant's development plan would mean the closure of the club for a lengthy period while house construction takes place. This will destroy the current children/youth programme and mean losing the momentum which our LTA-registered coach has achieved. She would also lose her employment and we cannot be sure she would return after the closure period.

Noting all of the above concerns, it is clear the development in its current form would not serve the best interests of the tennis club, as it would result in a significant worsening of conditions to the existing facilities which are in fine working order. Importantly, in planning policy terms, the scheme would fail to adhere with national, regional and local plan policies, which all seek to retain sports facilities, unless an assessment can show the facilities are surplus to requirements or a case can be made that the loss would be replaced by 'equivalent or better provision in terms of quality and quantity', or if the benefits of an alternative recreational use would outweigh the loss. In this instance, none of the above criteria would apply, as the scheme would result in a net loss of tennis courts, smaller replacement courts, the complete loss of external amenity space, and a more contrived clubhouse building, with an overall more cramped built form across the site that detracts from the open characteristics of the site. There would as a result be worse provision of sports facilities in terms of both quantity and quality, thus failing to satisfy London Plan Policy S5. Furthermore, the facilities are certainly not surplus to requirements as is evidenced through the high membership rates and usage throughout the year, so there is no justified reason to restrict the operation of the club, particularly when there are no benefits of the scheme that would outweigh the loss of sports facilities and open space.

Haringey have their own planning policy (DM49) that specifically seeks to protect social and community facilities unless a replacement facility is provided that meets the needs of the community. The Council have taken a consistent approach in rejecting development on sites that fail to comply with this policy/result in the loss of sports facilities, unless robust evidence is provided to demonstrate it is no longer required, as is evidenced through the recent refusal of application HY/2023/0733 on 31st May, which similarly sought to redevelop tennis courts and to introduce a residential use but at the Grove Lawn Tennis Club in Hornsey. This application sought to redevelop 3 vacant tennis courts and a pavilion building that have not been accessible to the public since 2007 (so was to a degree no longer providing a community function); however, this was deemed unacceptable as insufficient information was provided to demonstrate a tennis use or alternative community use could not take place at the site. Accordingly, it was deemed the proposal failed to meet policy DM49 and the application was refused. Noting this reason for refusal, the same consistent approach should be taken when reviewing these application proposals, as they would result in the net loss of sports facilities and a reduction in quality of the remaining facilities, to a club that is actually still active, thriving and very much providing a valuable function to the local community.

The proposals in their current form would compromise the viability and vitality of the tennis club, worsening the sports provision at the site, and failing to comply with national and local planning policies that seek to protect sports facilities. The tennis club as a result has significant concerns with the application proposals as currently presented.

Yours faithfully,



MARK SHEARMAN
Director

APPENDIX 1 | Photographs of existing courts surface



APPENDIX 2 | Comparison of current and proposed tennis court sizes

**COMPARISON OF
EXISTING AND PROPOSED TENNIS COURT SIZES
(width x length)**

	LTA minimum	Existing	Proposed
Southern courts 2-court cage	31.70m x 34.75m	28.64m x 35.19m	(lost to houses)
Northern courts 2-court cage	31.70m x 34.75m	26.91m x 30.71m	28.30m x 31.82m
Single court 1-court cage	17.07m x 34.75m	N/A	14.88m x 37.28m
Total courts		4	3

Dimensions measured from applicant's plans

APPENDIX 3 | Photograph of external amenity space forming hub of activity

