



**25/02147/FUL – Cambridge Rugby Union Club  
Grantchester Road Newnham Cambridge  
Cambridgeshire CB3 9ED**

**Application details**

**Report to:** Planning Committee

**Lead Officer:** Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

**Ward/parish:** Newnham

**Proposal:** Construction of 5no floodlit padel tennis courts with canopy, club hut and landscaping

**Applicant:** Padel Stars Limited

**Presenting officer:** Amy Stocks

**Reason presented to committee:** Third party representations, Site History, Policy Conflicts: referred by the Delegation Panel

**Member site visit date:** N/A

**Key issues:** 1. Green Belt

2. Siting, design and scale of padel courts and effects on character of the Protected Open Space, the site and setting of the edge of the City.

**Recommendation:** Refusal

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Table 1 Contents of report

### 1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The application is for the construction of 5no floodlit padel tennis courts with canopy, club hut and landscaping.
- 1.2 There is a clear need for padel courts within the City but the provision of the sports facilities would constitute inappropriate development in the green belt. The siting, scale and massing of the proposal would adversely impact the character and visual amenity of the site, the protected open space and setting of this part of the City adjacent to the open countryside contrary to both CLP 2018 and South Newnham NP policies 2025.
- 1.3 Officers recommend that the Planning Committee refuse the application.

Consultee	Object / No objection / No comment	Paragraph Reference

County Highways Development Management	No Objection	6.1
Drainage	No Objection	6.3
Ecology Officer	No Objection	6.5
Environmental Health	No Objection	6.6
Landscape Officer	No Objection	6.7
Recreation Development Department	Support	6.8
Sports England	No Objection	6.9
Sustainability Officer	No Objection	6.10
Third Party Representations (69)	No Objection, Objection and Neutral	7.1
Member Representations (2)	Objection	7.5
Local Interest Groups and Organisations / Petition (1)	Objection	7.8

Table 2 Consultee summary

## 2. Site description and context

- 2.1 The site is located within Newnham. To the north of the site are residential properties which front onto Fulbrooke and Grantchester Road. To the east and south of the site is the wider rugby club pitches. To the west of the site is the miniature railway society and tennis courts. The site is located within the green belt, is in flood zone 2, and is a protected area of open space. There are no other planning land designations.

## 3. The proposal

- 3.1 The application seeks permission for the construction of 5no floodlit padel tennis courts with canopy, club hut and landscaping.

#### 4. Relevant site history

Reference	Description	Outcome
24/04800/FUL	Construction of 5 padel tennis courts and a clubhouse hut within a weather-protection canopy, along with associated improvements to parking facilities and the private access road.	Withdrawn
25/00607/FUL	Erection of an aluminium framed building as an extension to the existing rugby clubhouse to accommodate a fitness gym	Permitted
22/03926/FUL	Engineering works to provide a grid system in order to strengthen the ground in areas of existing car parking (part retrospective)	Permitted
21/02356/FUL	Extension to the existing rugby club building to create a new children's nursery, together associated infrastructure and landscaping.	Permitted
19/0669/FUL	Installation of 15.0m floodlights (10 no.) to replace existing floodlights (10 no.), situated in different locations, serving training pitches nos. 2 and 4 (6 floodlights on pitch 2 and 4 floodlights on pitch 4).	Permitted
16/0401/FUL	Retention of a marquee (26 sq metres) to provide a refuge for spectators at rugby club events including mini and youth rugby.	Permitted
14/0967/FUL	Erection of replacement changing rooms, replacement dug outs and the retention of the existing temporary changing rooms for a period of 3 years.	Permitted
11/1078/FUL	Retention of temporary changing rooms and ancillary floorspace.	Permitted
11/0087/EXP	Extension of time for the implementation of planning permission reference 08/0382/FUL for the erection of two storey extension and associated works	Permitted

	(amended design to application C/03/0143/FP).	
08/0382/FUL	Erection of two storey extension and associated works (amended design to application C/03/0143/FP).	Permitted
08/0179/FUL	Alterations and extensions to existing Clubhouse and facilities (renewal of planning permission C/03/0143/FP)	Permitted
07/1376/FUL	Single storey side extension, re-roofing existing single storey building and erection of detached storage shed.	Refused
07/0165/FUL	Amended first floor terrace and staircase plus rear external staircase (amendment to application 04/1352/FUL)	Permitted
04/1352/FUL	Alterations and extensions to existing Clubhouse and facilities.	Permitted
C/03/0143	Alterations and extensions to existing clubhouse and facilities.	Permitted
C/02/0483	Removal of 5no existing floodlights and erection of 10no floodlights to south-east of existing clubhouse.	Permitted
C/02/0428	Demolition of existing clubhouse and erection of a part single, part two storey clubhouse (renewal of application ref: C/96/1093/FP).	Permitted
C/96/1093	Demolition of existing club house and erection of part single storey and part two storey club house.	Permitted
C/96/0065	Re-building of Clubhouse and provision of fitness and medical room.	Refused
C/92/0802	Change of use from agricultural land to sports playing fields (amended by letter and drawing dated 10.2.92, 12.2.92)	Permitted

C/84/0439	Erection of flood-lights	Permitted
C/73/0255	Erection of extension to existing Club-house	Permitted
C/67/0479	Extension to existing pavilion	Permitted

Table 2 Relevant site history

## **5. Policy**

### **5.1 National policy**

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

National Planning Practice Guidance

National Design Guide 2021

Environment Act 2021

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

ODPM Circular 06/2005 – Protected Species

Circular 11/95 (Conditions, Annex A)

### **5.2 Cambridge Local Plan (2018)**

Policy 4: The Cambridge Green Belt

Policy 31: Integrated water management and the water cycle

Policy 32: Flood risk

Policy 34: Light pollution control

Policy 35: Protection of human health from noise and vibration

Policy 55: Responding to context

Policy 56: Creating successful places

Policy 59: Designing landscape and the public realm

Policy 67: Protection of open space

Policy 69: Protection of sites of biodiversity and geodiversity importance

Policy 70: Protection of priority species and habitats

Policy 73: Community, sports and leisure facilities

Policy 80: Supporting sustainable access to development

Policy 81: Mitigating the transport impact of development

Policy 82: Parking management

### **5.3 Neighbourhood plan**

South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (made 24 February 2025)

### **5.4 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)**

Biodiversity SPD – Adopted February 2022

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD – Adopted January 2020

Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD – Adopted November 2016

Landscape in New Developments SPD – Adopted March 2010

## **6. Consultations**

### **Publicity**

Neighbour letters – Y

Site Notice – Y

Press Notice – N

### **County Highways Development Management - No Objection**

6.1 *Comment dated 1st July 2025:* No objection to the proposal subject to the following conditions and comments:

- Footway improvements
- Informative relating to works within highway land

6.2 *Comment dated 1st September 2025:* No objection to the proposal subject to the following conditions and comments:

- Footway improvements
- Informative relating to works within highway land

### **Drainage Officer- No Objection**

6.3 *Comment dated 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025:* Objection for the following reasons:

- Surface Water Drainage Strategy unacceptable
- Drainage calculations for the entire drainage system up to a 1 in 100 year plus climate change event are required. The calculations should use FEH22 and have CV values set to 1.
- Infiltration tests using BRE Digest 365 must be carried out on site to confirm that infiltration would a viable option for the management of surface water.
- The proposed detention basin and swales have side slopes of at most 1 in 3 with 1 in 4 preferred, The SuDS manual C753. It is noted they are currently designed as 1 in 2 and 1 in 0.5 respectively.

- Officers will need to investigate whether a Sequential Test and Exception Test is necessary.

6.4 *Comment dated 26<sup>th</sup> August 2025:* No objection to the proposal subject to the following conditions and comments:

- Flood Risk Assessment compliance

### **Ecology Officer- No Objection**

6.5 No objection to the proposal subject to the following comments:

- Ecological enhancement scheme
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Plan
- Ecologically sensitive artificial lighting scheme

### **Environmental Health- No Objection**

6.6 No objection to the proposal subject to the following comments:

- Construction hours
- External lighting
- Floodlighting hours of use
- Hours of use

### **Landscape Officer- No Objection**

6.7 *Comment dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023:* The following has been raised:

- Protected Open Space – the site as a whole is a protected open space which generally precludes the development of structures within the site without any replacement space re-provided.
- Greenbelt – the site is also a part of the Cambridge Greenbelt to which development has to consider the impact on openness. Landscape does not provide comments on greenbelt impact but this instance the canopies may be considered as affecting the openness of the greenbelt.
- There are concerns over the impact of the height and scale of the canopies on the visual envelope and the presence of other structures which may impact
- There are concerns that not all the existing site information has been shown on the submission which would have relevance on the cumulative impacts of the various intrusions into the greenbelt/protected open space.
- Sections, elevations and plans should all have dimensions on them
- The canopies are tall and Landscape and Visual Assessment will be needed to determine the level of harm and whether that would be acceptable or not.



- View points to be agreed but should include both local and more distant viewpoints.
- The South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan is an adopted Neighbourhood Plan and includes protected views. Two of these, from either corner of the rugby club site against Grantchester Road form part of the proposal site. The canopies and courts would feature in these views which are special with respect to the juxtaposition of rural and urban edges which the canopies would impose on.
- Generally, there is a feeling that the courts themselves are less problematic in Landscape terms than the canopies and further consideration is recommended of uncovered courts.

### **Recreation Development Department - Support**

6.8 The following has been raised:

- The Recreation team within the City Council would support in principle the creation of Padel facilities within the City at the Cambridge Rugby Club.
- The department regularly get emails enquiring on any land availability and/or partnership opportunities to work with commercial Padel providers for provision in our open spaces.
- The department have been working with the local LTA (Lawn Tennis Association) representatives on how we may progress the roll out of Padel within the City, as the only site currently available are two courts at the University Sports Centre in West Cambridge.
- The city is currently under provided for to the sum of around 10 courts currently.
- If the proposal is acceptable, it is requested a Condition may be added that the provider gives over some free court time and support for local residents and community groups to participate in “come and try activities and coaching” on the Padel facility, very similar to that already hosted by Parktennis on Jesus Green Tennis courts every Saturday morning.

### **Sports England - No Objection**

6.9 No objection to the proposal subject to the following conditions:

- Restoration of playing field

### **Sustainability Officer - No Objection**

6.10 No objection, there are considered to be no material sustainable design and construction issues with this application.

## **7. Third party representations**

7.1 69 representations have been received.

7.2 Those in objection have raised the following issues:

- Noise pollution: Padel is a noisy sport, the hard bats and enclosed courts will exacerbate this noise. Padel can reach 68-70dBm which is higher than that of a summer festival. This will cause disturbance to neighbouring residents (especially within garden spaces). The rugby club already host noisy music events. The noise assessment provided is not representative of true background noise and therefore should be redone.
- WHO guidelines suggest 50dB max for moderate annoyance.
- Socialising noise is encouraged by the applicant
- Light pollution: The proposed floodlights are damaging to wildlife and contrary to the semi-rural character of the area. The floodlights will fail to maintain dark skies and low light levels.
- Traffic safety: Traffic is an issue on Grantchester Road (especially during peak hours). The development will increase traffic (42 vehicle movements), which is a risk to children cycling to school and pedestrians. There are concerns about the visibility from the site, potential for speeding vehicles and lack of traffic management. The submitted traffic assessment does not reflect reality. Idling and accelerating of vehicles will disturb neighbouring residents.
- Only six bike racks promotes a reliance on cars
- Green Belt: The site is green belt land and this should be protected. The applicant claims the site is grey belt which is not true. The proposal would intrude upon protected views V3 and V5 of the Newham Neighbourhood Plan. The existing buildings on site already dominate the landscape.
- The proposal will be overdevelopment of the site.
- The proposed Padel courts and canopies would have a significant impact visual on the appearance of the location when visually viewed against the current Rugby Club Stand.
- The scale, massing and design of the proposed structures are out of character with the surrounding area.
- The proposal will impact local wildlife using flood lights. The proposal results in loss of habitat units, offsetting via environmental banks should not be allowed.
- The construction materials used in creating the courts will need to be replaced in the future, where will the discarded material go.

- The site is in two flood zones; there is a lack of clarity on flood risk mitigation and run-off management.
- There has been a lack of transparency in notifying nearby neighbours.
- There are existing unapproved structures on the site. The long marquee structure to the north of the club house which has sitting out benches/tables plus a lockable bar structure. Two portacabins to the south of the club house – south of the area for the proposed Gym. The large scaffolding tower on the eastern side of the main pitch facing the tiered seating which is covered with hoarding from advertisers and sponsors.
- The application demonstrates contempt for planning law
- Other sites in Cambridge would be more suitable, such as the University Sports Centre.
- The proposal should not be located within residential areas and within green belt land.
- The previous cricket ground was rejected so why is padel being considered.
- The proposal is contrary to policies; SNNP1, SNNP2 SNNP3 SNNP12, SNNP11c, SNNP15 of the Newham Neighbourhood Plan. Policy 4, 32, 34, 35, 55c and 57 of the Cambridge Local Plan.

### 7.3 Those in support have given the following reasons:

- Padel is a fast growing sport and promotes physical, mental health, and social benefits. This aligns with the governments broader goals.
- The sport is accessible for all ages and abilities.
- The courts would be a valuable addition to the local community within an area with limited sports facilities.
- Cambridge Rugby Club has a history of community engagement and inclusivity; the addition of the courts will enhance the clubs offerings.
- The courts will diversify income and support the sustainability of the club.
- The site is a well-chosen location. The courts will be located far away from neighbouring residents and will have low visual impact.
- Sports England and the Mayor support this proposal.

### 7.4 Those raising neutral comments have given the following reasons:

- Welcome the plan to build on what is currently an empty, unused and visually unappealing plot.
- The new design is better than what was previously proposed.
- The new proposal to retain the majority of the Leylandii cypress border is welcomed.
- The current proposal for a 6 monthly maintenance of the proposed reduction to 10m seems potentially unsustainable.

- The plan to fell the ash tree on the back of the site (numbered T003) is unjustified on the explanation given in the tree survey. This tree too acts as a natural visual barrier between the depot and Ditton Meadows.
- The plans include the planting of new trees and on balance may increase the protective coverage both for the new houses and towards the meadows.
- Encourage the council to ensure that the overall landscaping proposal would increase rather than decrease the tree coverage in this sensitive location.

7.5 Two Councillors made representations on the application.

7.6 Cllr Clough made the following comments:

- There are three unpermitted structures on site that are not shown within the submitted documents.
- The proposal is contrary to green belt policy, the site should not be considered as grey belt.
- Cumulative impact should be considered in light of the recently approved gym extension.
- Concerns have been raised regarding the runoff and waterlogging due to the site being gault clay.
- The proposed floodlights will disrupt wildlife, no ecological assessment has been provided.
- Padel noise is likely to be a nuisance, noise report provided is inadequate.
- Development transforms the site into a major sports location which is not suitable for the surrounding context.

7.7 Cllr Glasberg called the application into committee and made the following comments:

- The proposal is not compliant with policies in the Cambridge Local Plan 2018 and the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan 2025 on Green Belt, Biodiversity, Flood Risk and Light pollution.
- It fails to make a positive contribution to the setting and landscape character of this Green Belt area and has a negative impact on residential amenity.
- Key policies are: Paragraph 187d of the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024), and Neighbourhood Plan Policy SNNP2 Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain Neighbourhood Plan Policy SNNP1 Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity Local Plan Policy 32 Flood Risk. Local Plan Policy 34, Light Pollution Control,

and Neighbourhood Plan Policy SNNP3 Reduce and Maintain Low Levels of Light Pollution Local Plan 35 Protection of human health and quality of life from noise and vibration, and Neighbourhood Plan SNNP12 Protecting Residential Amenity in South Newnham Local Plan Policy 55c Responding to Context, Policy 57 a, c and d Designing New Buildings, and Neighbourhood Plan Policies SNNP11c Protecting and Enhancing Local Character through Design-Led Development and SNNP15 Conserving and Enhancing Existing Views and Street Scenes.

- The club is based on Green Belt land and this application does not comply with applicable policies from the National Planning Policy Framework (2012-2024), Cambridge City Local Plan (2018) and South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (2024). Local Plan Policy 4 The Cambridge Green Belt, requires proposals for new developments in the Green Belt to justify Very Special Circumstances, which can only be approved in line with Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (2012 24). The site is designated both Green Belt and a Protected Open Space in the Cambridge Policies Map 2018. The construction of 5 padel courts, 3 of which are under an all-weather canopy, and will be used from 7am to 10pm seven days a week and lit at night by floodlights does not justify the Very Special Circumstances required for a development on Green Belt land.
- This is a recreation ground but there is a history of incremental encroachment and increase in structures which have been placed on the site without planning permission. There is also a current application for a Gym on the site which has not yet been decided.
- There are objections from neighbours about the level of noise and disruption that would be experienced by those living near the site, and also serious concerns about the level of additional traffic that would be generated.

7.8 The South Newnham Neighbourhood forum commented in objection to the scheme. Their comments are summarised as follows:

- The proposal is contrary to the objectives of the green belt and is protected open space. The scale of the proposal does not provide very special circumstances required under local plan policy 4 and the NPPF.

- The proposal fails to comply with neighbourhood plan SNNP1. There are no measures to mitigate biodiversity, but the forum supports the comments made by the council's ecology officer regarding conditions.
- The proposal has a net loss of BNG. The forum insists that gain be achieved on site not via credits.
- The proposed flood lighting will cause increase in noise and light pollution impacting local wildlife and residents.
- The proposal is not a positive contribution to the landscape character of the green belt.
- Surface water runoff caused by the proposal is concerning and if the swales can absorb this.
- There has been historical flooding from the Bin Brook into Gough Way which raises concerns.
- Previous applications had stricter drainage conditions.
- The submitted FRA lacks ground investigations and omits sequential testing and exception test.
- The forum requests monitoring and reporting system on the outlet to the brook to ensure flood risk is not increased.
- Light pollution is a concern. There are no details of the flood lights, some lights will be completely external. Proposed lights will allow for significant light spill.
- Forum requests a light study be undertaken to assess the impacts of light levels with ongoing monitoring if allowed.
- Noise pollution from the club currently exists. Padel courts are known to be noisy. No site specific noise assessment has been conducted, the reliance on other locations for data is inadequate.
- Site specific noise assessment is needed.
- Design and character do not reflect the local character nor contribute to the landscape. The scale is inappropriate in the green belt.
- Concerns regarding traffic congestion and safety due to increased vehicle movements.
- Forum considers the traffic will adversely affect road users and residents.

7.9 The above representations are a summary of the comments that have been received. Full details of the representations are available on the Council's website.

## **8. Assessment**

- 8.1 From the consultation responses and representations received and from an inspection of the site and the surroundings, the key issues are:
- Principle of development- Green belt assessment and Protected OS
  - Design, layout, scale and landscaping
  - Biodiversity
  - Water management and flood risk
  - Highway safety and transport impacts
  - Car and cycle parking
  - Amenity
  - Other matters
  - Planning balance
  - Recommendation

## **9. Principle of Development**

### ***Community, sports and leisure facilities***

- 9.1 Policy 73 of the Cambridge local plan refers to the provision of new or enhanced sports facilities and that proposals of this nature will be permitted providing:

- a. the range, quality and accessibility of facilities are improved;*
- b. there is a local need for the facilities; and*
- c. the facility is in close proximity to the people it serves.*

*New city-wide or sub-regional community, sports or leisure facilities should also:*

- d. be permitted if they are provided in sustainable locations;*
- e. comply with the National Planning Policy Framework's sequential approach;*
- f. demonstrate the need for the proposal within the catchment area it is expected to serve;*
- g. demonstrate that it would not have a negative impact upon the vitality and viability of the city centre, including its evening economy; and*
- h. where possible, include in the proposal facilities which are open to the wider community, to enhance both accessibility and the range of facilities available.*

*Proposals for new and improved sports and leisure facilities will be supported where they improve the range, quality and access to facilities both within Cambridge and, where appropriate, in the sub-region.*

*Proposals should have regard to the Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor Sports Facility Strategy. This policy is relevant to a wide range of facilities from health clubs that serve parts of the city to leisure and sports provision that serve the city and sub-region, such as a concert hall, community sports stadium and sports complex. In securing a suitable location for city-wide or sub-regional facilities, developers will be expected to demonstrate use of the sequential test in considering sites for development. Loss of facilities The loss of a facility or site that was last in use as a community, sports or leisure facility will only be permitted if it is demonstrated that:*

- i. the facility/site can be replaced within the new development or relocated to at least its existing scale, range, quality and accessibility for its users. For leisure uses, it should satisfy peak period need; or*
- j. the facility/site is no longer needed.*

*In providing evidence that a facility/site is no longer needed, the guidance in Appendix K of the plan should be adhered to. The redevelopment of school sites for other uses will be permitted only if it can be demonstrated that they are not required in the longer term for continued educational use.*

#### *Facilities provided as part of development*

*Mixed-use development proposals which provide on-site community and/or leisure facilities will be permitted where these are of a type appropriate to the scale of the development and to meeting the needs of future residents, employees and visitors.*

*In the case of urban extensions and large-scale regeneration schemes, this should be in the form of a new, dedicated community centre and, where necessary, education and childcare facilities. For medium and smaller-scale developments in the city, the facilities required will be at the neighbourhood or local level, usually a community house or room.*

- 9.2 The proposed Padel courts will be addressing an unmet need for this type of support within the City. Sport England support the proposal as do the Councils Recreation Department. The proposal is supported through policy 73.



## **Green and Grey Belt Assessment**

- 9.3 Policy 4 of the Local Plan defers to national guidance on Green Belt. Chapter 13 of the NPPF deals with protecting Green Belt. Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 9.4 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF sets out the Green Belt serves five purposes:
- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
  - b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
  - c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
  - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
  - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*
- 9.5 Paragraph 151 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
- 9.6 Paragraph 153 states that local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason on inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 9.7 Paragraph 154 states that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate subject to exceptions. Criteria b) exception states:
- b) The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it; [officer underline]*

9.8 Two of the five courts are uncovered; these courts would constitute outdoor sport. Three covered courts would not be for outdoor sport – because they are covered - and are therefore inappropriate requiring very special circumstances (VSC). Even if the covered courts were – in the alternative - considered to be in connection with outdoor sport, the presence of the canopies to the courts and the glass and steel mesh enclosures fail the second test required of criteria b) underlined above.

9.9 Together these elements of the proposal would provide a significant enclosing effect and negatively impact on both the spatial and visual qualities of openness attributable to the green belt in this location. This is evident in proposed views 1, 2 and 3 of the applicant's submission. The domed canopies at 8.7m high and to a lesser extent their enclosures, would introduce a noticeable and cluttered form of development extending outwards into the fields. The height of the domes would disrupt longer distance views of the tree line, only marginally below the height of the main stand. Their siting would be at odds with the linear form of buildings already on the site, jutting into and between the rugby pitches. Significant visual and spatial harm to the green belt would arise. Very special circumstances are required.

9.10 The applicants argue that the site is grey belt, and the development should benefit from this classification of the land, disengaging the full requirements of NPPF paras 153 & 154 and that an exception to inappropriateness is provided by virtue of para. 155.

9.11 Annex 2 (Glossary) of the NPPF defines grey belt as:

*For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.*

9.12 Para 155 of the NPPF states that 'The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all the following apply.

a) The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;

- b) There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- c) The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and
- d) Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.

9.13 Grey Belt land excludes land relating to areas or assets in footnote 7. Footnote 7 of the NPPF states:

*The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.*

9.14 The site is located within flood zone 2 and is therefore in an area at risk of flooding. However, the applicant has demonstrated that the proposal will not give rise to flood impacts, thus overcoming officers' previous concerns (please see drainage comments (paragraph 6.3) and section 13 of this report). The proposal would not pose a strong reason for refusal on the grounds listed under footnote 7.

9.15 The proposed courts will be located within the wider envelope of the rugby club, with pitches to the front and rear of the proposed courts. Point (a) of the definition relates to the land strongly contributing to the purposes of unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, point (b) refers to the prevention of neighbouring towns merging, and point (d) which refers to preserving the special character of historic towns. These points will be discussed below. However, to fully assess these points, the Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment (2021) must first be considered.

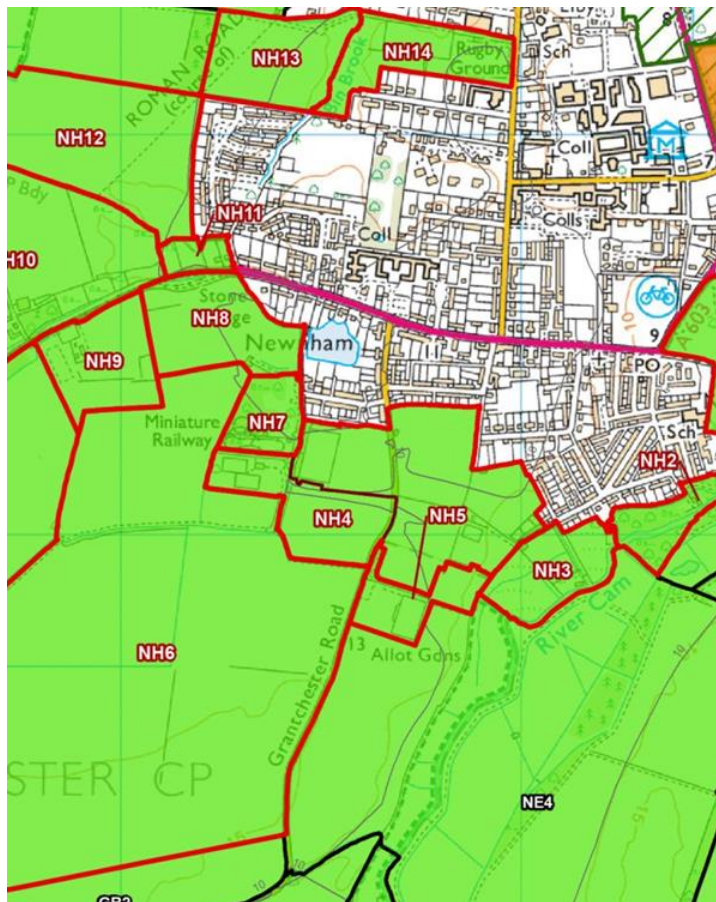
9.16 The site has been assessed under the Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment (2021) (GCGBA). The assessment seeks to identify the variations in the openness and the extent to which land contributes to the purposes of the Green Belt. This assessment uses this to inform where the variations in the potential harm to the purposes of the green belt of releasing land within the designation. The assessment reviews allocated sites within the green belt and assess them against the following criteria:

*Purpose 1 (Preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre) the purpose is relevant only to land around the City, and the extent to which land contributes to this purpose is dependent on the variations in openness and in the degree of distinction from the edge of Cambridge.*

*Purpose 2 (Maintain and enhance the quality of its setting), is a two-element approach was taken considering: Element 1 – the extent to which land constitutes countryside (that is to say has a rural character) based on its usage and distinction from an inset settlement. The first element -the assessment of rural character -was based on variations in openness and in the degree of distinction but was applied to all settlements rather than just Cambridge. Element 2 – the extent to which land forms or contains other features or aspects that contribute to the quality of Cambridge's setting. This is a separate consideration which is not informed by openness and distinction. For the second element an analysis was undertaken of key views and visual inter-relationships; green corridors; approaches to the historic core and wider city; designated sites and landscape elements that contribute to character; the scale character, identity and rural setting of the Green Belt villages; and the topography providing a framework to the city. These elements were mapped, in order to identify variations in the relevance of each.*

*Purpose 3 (Prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the city), an analysis was undertaken of the distribution of villages in and around the Green Belt and the physical features that separate and/or connect them from each other or from Cambridge.*

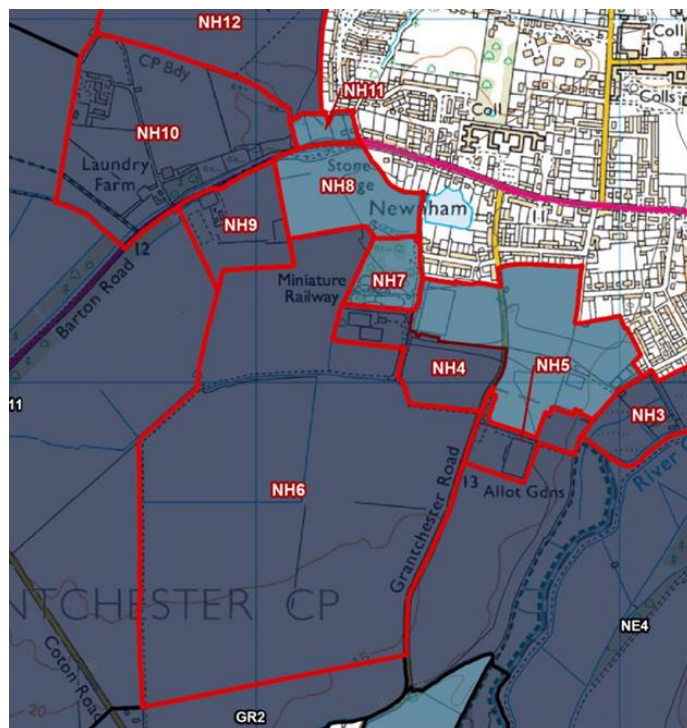
- 9.17 The purposes align with points a, b, and d of paragraph 143 of the NPPF and the grey belt definition under annex 2. The application site is referenced within this assessment. The site straddles two sub-parcels of land within the parcel of land reference NH4.



#### Absolute constraints

- [Orange fill] CRoW Registered Common Land
- [Blue outline] Scheduled monument
- [Green diagonal lines] Registered park & garden

Figure 1: Green belt  
Assessment land parcels in Newnham <sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [Appendix B - Cambridge - Newnham](#)

*Figure 2: Green belt Assessment land parcels in Newnham and the level of harm<sup>2</sup>*

9.18 Figure 2 depicts the level of harm should the parcels of land be removed from the green belt. Parcel NH4 shows a very high level of harm to the south of the parcel and a high level of harm to the north. The location of the courts will be located on this border between the harm levels, more on the side of very high harm.

9.19 The assessment designates parcel NH4 as follows:

Settlement	Parcel Ref	Release Scenario	Area (ha)	P1 Contribution	P2 Contribution	P3 Contribution	Harm
Cambridge - Newnham	NH4	Release of land out to the western and southwestern edges of the parcel (map areas 1 and 2), as an expansion of Cambridge (Newnham)	40.37	Relatively significant	Moderate	Relatively significant	Very High

*Figure 3: Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment for parcel NH4 (2021)<sup>3</sup>*

9.20 Figures 1 and 2 shows parcel NH4 was considered to contribute to the objectives of the green belt. The scenario is based on the release of land to the western and southwestern edges of the parcel. The assessed loss of contribution of land to the Green Belt purposes was combined with the assessed impact of its release on remaining land designated as Green Belt to determine an overall rating of the harm of releasing land from the Green Belt for each of the defined parcels. The site is considered to positively respond to purposes 1, 2 and 3. The removal of the land from the Green Belt would be harmful. The level of harm for the release of the land is very high. It follows that the land upon which the application site sits strongly contributes to purposes (a), (b), and (d) as set out in NPPF para 143. The proposal is therefore not on grey belt land and does not benefit from the exclusion of inappropriateness provided by NPPF para. 155.

#### *Very Special Circumstances*

9.21 The applicants have provided very special circumstances (VSC's). These are set out below:

<sup>2</sup> [Appendix B - Cambridge - Newnham](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Greater Cambridge Green Belt Assessment](#)

- 9.22     **Access to sport:** Padel tennis is the fastest growing sport in the UK and is accessible to players of all ages and abilities. It also offers a unique opportunity for disabled athletes.
- 9.23     **Social benefits:** Padel tennis is a social game, being played by 4 players on each court. The sport promotes participation and social integration.
- 9.24     **Health benefits:** Padel tennis has wide reaching health benefits for all players, including improving physical fitness, strength and flexibility. It also improves mental wellbeing through helping to improve concentration while also being a social sport.
- 9.25     **Protection from adverse weather:** In 2023 there were 172 rain days in the UK, decreasing slightly to 164 rain days in 2024, equating to an average of 46% days being affected by rain. Rainfall (including snow), icy conditions together with sun and heat exposure in the summer months will have a significant impact on the playability of uncovered courts.
- 9.26     **Biodiversity gains:** The application is supported by a BNG Report by Sweco, which confirms that the development will result in BNG with the purchase of off-site credits.
- 9.27     **Economic benefits:** The development will generate tangible economic benefits, including the creation of jobs during the construction phase and then creating 3 full time and 3-4 part time positions as well as 4-5 freelance coaches. In total, therefore, there will be up to 10 people employed at the site once the facility is fully operational. In addition to this, the development will create an essential additional income stream for Cambridge RFC (as landowner) as a result of additional rental income.
- 9.28     **Spatial benefits:** The development would further establish, enhance and diversify the cluster of sports infrastructure at and around the application site. This is in line with the spatial objectives of the development plan, which encourages the use of the GB for enhancing access to sport and recreation.
- 9.29     The VSC's put forward are largely generic benefits of Padel sport's development in general and could arise from almost any location in or around Cambridge. They do not constitute very special circumstances. There is no compelling evidence to suggest the future of the Rugby Club's financial status is dependent on the grant of permission for Padel courts on the site. Cambridge is a relatively compact City and co-location of sports facilities is desirable but not essential for their successful use. Cambridge is also one of the driest locations in the Country and covered courts in Cambridge would provide less benefit from the rain than other locations in the UK. The need for the courts, and the weight to be attributed to this, is set out below. The BNG benefits are marginal and required of most developments in and around Cambridge and in no way are these unique or significantly beneficial.
- 9.30     **Protected Open Space**

- 9.31 The site benefits from a protected open space classification and is protected for both its environmental and recreational qualities (Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2011, site SPO 05). Sites that benefit from this designation that result in harm to the character of or lead to the loss of open space of environmental and/or recreational importance will not be supported unless the open space can be satisfactorily replaced. The proposal would cause harm to the character of the protected open space, for design, layout, scale and landscaping reasons, including harm to identified protected views in the Neighbourhood Plan, as set out below. The site would continue in recreational use providing a wider variety of recreational uses for the site, which is encouraged by policy 67 and no recreational loss would be experienced.
- 9.32 The application fails to mitigate harm to the character of the protected open space, and is contrary to Cambridge Local Plan (2018) policy 67.

## **10. Need for Padel Courts**

- 10.1 Padel is a racket sport. The sport is played in doubles and is best played on a padel court. Sports England is supportive of the proposal subject to imposition of a condition relating to the retention of rugby pitches within the grounds.
- 10.2 The recreation development department have been consulted to establish the need for padel courts within the city. They have confirmed there is a need for Padel courts within the City. There are two available courts at the University Sports Centre in West Cambridge, apart from this provision, there are no other known designated padel courts. Working with the LTA, the department have established the need for padel courts within the City, this is as follows:

<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Tennis Demand 20%</b>	<b>Padel Demand 8%</b>	<b>No. Padel courts</b>
<b>2021</b>	123,867	24,773	1,982	<b>10</b>
<b>2024</b>	147,332	29,466	2,357	<b>12</b>
<b>2030</b>	159,044	31,809	2,545	<b>13</b>

- 10.3 As shown by the table above the statistics show an under provision of 10 padel courts within the city. The statistics above will be published as part of the Local Plan as a supplementary document to cover the wider Cambridge



City and South Cambridgeshire district area. There is a clear need for padel courts within the City which this scheme would help meet.

## **11. Design, layout, scale and landscaping.**

- 11.1 Policies 55, 56, 57 and 59 of the CLP 2018 and policy SNNP11 of the South Newnham NP seek to ensure that development responds appropriately to its context, is of a high quality, reflects or successfully contrasts with existing building forms and materials and includes appropriate landscaping and boundary treatment.
- 11.2 The application includes the development of 5 padel courts at the rugby club, inclusive of a shed and seating area. Of the 5 padel courts, three will be covered while two will remain open. Each padel court will benefit from an enclosure with steel mesh and glass elevations. The enclosures will be 4m in height. Those that benefit from a roof cover will have structures which are domed in appearance, at a height of approximately 8.7m sloping down to 6.3m at its lowest. The courts will be 10m in width by 19m in length. The layout of the pitches is broadly linear in appearance bar one court that will be located behind the existing club house and recently approved gym extension as permitted under permission (25/00607/FUL). Each pitch will benefit from four floodlights that will be circa 6.2m in height, the floodlights will be angled down towards the court itself, and where covered, will be located under the domed roof.
- 11.3 A club hut and landscaping to the rear of the courts are also being proposed. The club hut is a shed like structure which will serve the courts, the hut will be 3.5m in height, 3.9m in depth and 7.9m in length. There will also be a landscaped area to the rear of the courts where users can sit outside. Officers consider this addition to be small in scale and would not adversely impact the visual amenity of the area.
- 11.4 Officers acknowledge the improvements the applicant has made to the scheme by lowering the apex of the roofs by 1m, including some courts to be uncovered and by using a broadly acceptable colour palette. However, there are still concerns over the siting, scale and massing of the covered pitches. The domed roofs are large in height and would not respect the visual amenity of the site within this part of the open countryside in its setting to the southern edge of the City. Due to the scale and massing of the proposed court covers, the proposal fails to positively respond to the surrounding context and is contrary to policies 55, 56 and 59 of the Cambridge City local Plan (2018) and policy SNNP11 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 11.5 The landscape department have been consulted on the application. There are concerns over the impact of the height and scale of the canopies on the visual envelope and the presence of other structures which may impact. There are concerns that not all the existing site information has been shown on the submission which would have relevance on the cumulative impacts of the various intrusions into the greenbelt/protected open space. The

Newnham Neighbourhood Plan is an adopted Neighbourhood Plan and includes protected views. Two of these, from either corner of the rugby club site against Grantchester Road form part of the proposal site. The canopies and courts would feature in these views which are special with respect to the juxtaposition of rural and urban edges which the canopies would impose on. Generally, there is a consideration that the courts themselves are less problematic in Landscape terms than the canopies and further consideration is recommended of uncovered courts. Landscape officers also drew attention to the scheme being within protected open space and the green belt.

- 11.6 The Newnham neighbourhood plan refers to protected views within the grounds of the site. Policy SNNP15 refers to Conserving and Enhancing Existing Views and Street Scenes, map 8 of the document shows views.

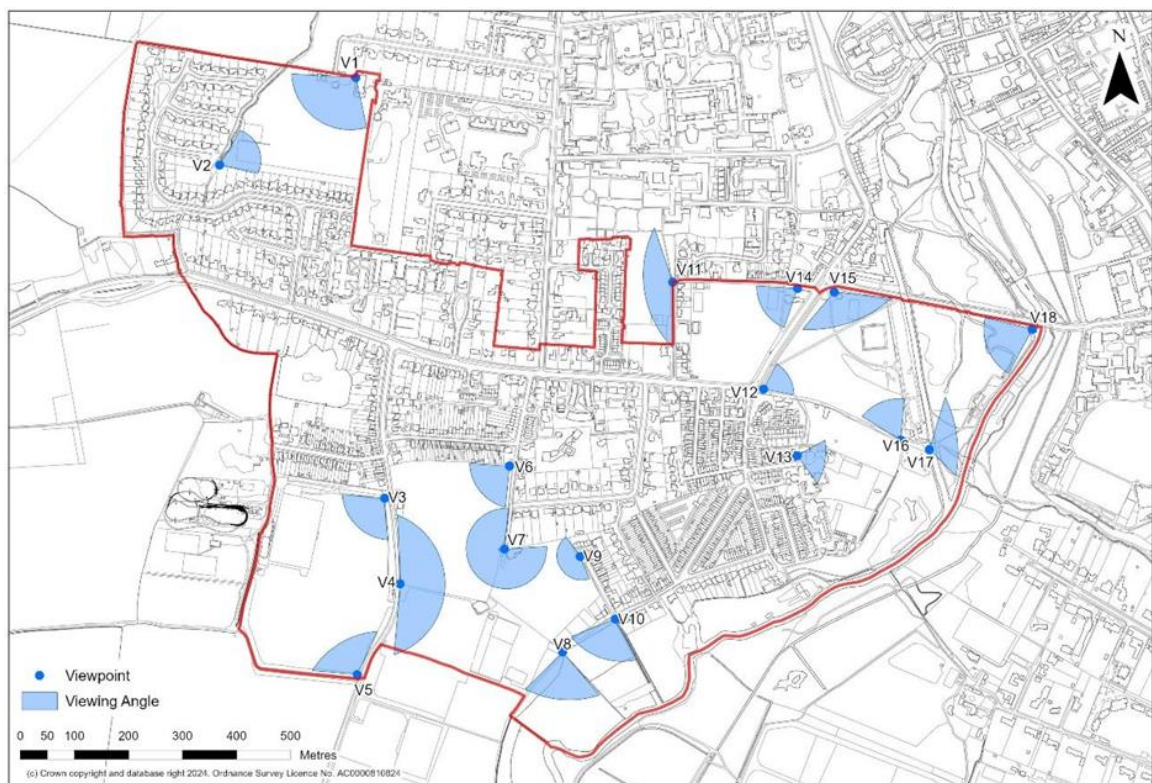


Figure 3: South Newnham Neighbourhood<sup>4</sup> – Area Views

- 11.7 Figure 3 depicts these views. Views V3 and V5 will be the most impacted by this application. Officers consider the proposed courts would interrupt the openness of these views and would not conserve nor enhance the landscape. Any future development should seek to respect and enhance these views. In its current format, it is not considered the proposal respects these open views.
- 11.8 Policy 34 addresses light pollution control. The policy protects neighbouring amenity, ecology and the visual character from the impact of light pollution.

<sup>4</sup> [South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Each of the courts will benefit from four flood lights. The flood lights will be faced down into the courts. In terms of residential amenity, officers do not consider the floodlighting will adversely impact the surrounding residents. The surrounding residential properties are of the distance from the courts that while lighting will be seen it is not considered to adversely impact amenity levels. In terms of ecology, the council's ecology officer has reviewed the proposed lighting to be used on site and considers further information to eliminate impact on local species can be secured via condition. The impact of landscape character is more complex. Presently the inclusion of flood lighting within the green belt has the potential to overspill into the surrounding character.

- 11.9 The site benefits from previous permissions where flood lighting has been permitted to serve the existing rugby use one site (19/0669/FUL). The flood lights under permission 19/0669/FUL are restricted to not be used outside the hours of 1200 hrs to 2200 hrs and shall only be used between the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April. While the flood lights would add to this overspill, in combination with the further details of lux arcs and similar restrictions, officers do not consider the addition of lights within the courts would be a reasonable reason to refuse given the existing use of flood lights on the site. Officers consider the mitigation of the provided flood lighting in combination with the restricted usage hours would mean the lighting would be in accordance with policy 34 of the Cambridge Local Plan and policy SNNP3 of the Newham neighbourhood plan.
- 11.10 Overall, the proposed development fails to accord with Cambridge Local Plan (2018) policies 55, 56, 57 and 59 and policies SNNP11 and SNNP15 of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (2025).

## **12. Biodiversity**

- 12.1 The Environment Act 2021 and the Councils' Biodiversity SPD (2022) requires development proposals to deliver a net gain in biodiversity following a mitigation hierarchy which is focused on avoiding ecological harm over minimising, rectifying, reducing and then off-setting. This approach is embedded within the strategic objectives of the Local Plan and policy 70. Policy 70 states that proposals that harm or disturb populations and habitats should secure achievable mitigation and / or compensatory measures resulting in either no net loss or a net gain of priority habitat and local populations of priority species.
- 12.2 The site currently consists of grassland and building with a row of trees on western boundary. It lies within a conservation risk zone but does not meet the criteria in which a consultation with Natural England would require. Species data barn and other bird species, hedgehogs and bats have been recorded locally.

- 12.3 The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Ecology Officer. No protected species surveys have been completed and submitted with this application. But given that the only habitat is of poor value modified grassland, the department considered further surveys are not justified.
- 12.4 The submitted BNG assessment and metric has calculated a loss of all current habitats within the redline boundary and deficit of 0.39 habitat units. It has been recommended that an off-site purchase for this deficit be undertaken. This can be evidenced as part of a planning condition.
- 12.5 A row of trees forms part of the western boundary of the site. This has the potential to provide both foraging and commuting corridors for bat species which have been recorded locally. Therefore, a wildlife sensitive lighting scheme should be designed to reduce impacts on foraging and commuting bats. The scheme should be secured by a separate condition of any consent. Guidance should be followed in Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night Guidance Note 08/23.
- 12.6 Where lighting falls on sensitive habitat, namely the embankment at the north of the site to be a wildlife sensitive lighting scheme should be designed to reduce impacts on foraging and commuting bats. Guidance should be followed in Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night Guidance Note 08/23, with LED lighting used which emit no ultraviolet light, Luminaires equal to or less 2,700k should be adopted, light sources should feature peak wavelengths higher than 550 nm to avoid the component of light most disturbing to bats.
- 12.7 Reasonable biodiversity enhancements for protected, Priority and threatened species should be identified and implemented to secure net gains for biodiversity, as outlined under Paragraph 187d and 193d of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024). The reasonable biodiversity enhancement measures should be outlined within a separate Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme and should be secured by a condition of any consent.
- 12.8 Cllr representations have highlighted the scheme is contrary to policies SNNP2 (delivering BNG) and SNNP1 (protecting and enhancing biodiversity). Considering the ecology officers response, it would be reasonable to secure compliance with the deliverance of BNG and an enhancement scheme via conditions, thus complying with local neighbourhood plan policies.

- 12.9 Taking the above into account, subject to conditions, the proposal is compliant with 69 and 70 of the Cambridge Local Plan (2018) and policies SNNP1 and SNNP2 of the Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (2021).

### **13. Water management and flood risk**

- 13.1 Policies 31 and 32 of the Local Plan require developments to have appropriate sustainable foul and surface water drainage systems and minimise flood risk. Paras. 170 – 182 of the NPPF are relevant.
- 13.2 The site lies in flood zone 2 and is identified in an area of low (1 in 1000) to high (1 in 30) surface water flood risk. The site proposes an unlined vegetated bioretention/detention basin located to the south of the courts and dry swales located along the eastern and southern edges of the development. Overflow from the detention basin will outflow into the adjacent Bin Brook at a reduced rate of 5 l/s. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Drainage Strategy has been reviewed and deemed acceptable by the Council's drainage department.
- 13.3 The drainage department raised whether a Sequential Test and Exception Test is necessary.
- 13.4 As defined by the MHCLG, the Sequential Test ensures that a sequential, risk-based approach is followed to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding, taking all sources of flood risk and climate change into account. The Sequential Test should be applied to 'Major' and 'Non-major development' proposed in areas at risk of flooding.
- 13.5 The Exception Test requires two additional elements to be satisfied (as set out in paragraph 178 of the National Planning Policy Framework) before allowing development to be allocated or permitted in situations where suitable sites at lower risk of flooding are not available following application of the sequential test. It should be demonstrated that development that must be in a flood risk area will provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk and the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.
- 13.6 In applying paragraph 175 a proportionate approach should be taken. Where a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates clearly that the proposed layout, design, and mitigation measures would ensure that occupiers and users would remain safe from current and future surface

water flood risk for the lifetime of the development (therefore addressing the risks identified e.g. by Environment Agency flood risk mapping), without increasing flood risk elsewhere, then the sequential test need not be applied. Officers have discussed the application, and it is unlikely the proposal would overall increase flood risk elsewhere on site. The proposal sees the provision of a recreational facility within the confines of an existing recreational facility, therefore there will be no increase in vulnerability on the site in terms of use. In this instance officers do not consider it reasonable to request a sequential test to be undertaken.

- 13.7 The applicants have suitably addressed the issues of water management and flood risk, and subject to conditions the proposal is in accordance with Local Plan policies 31 and 32 and NPPF advice.

#### **14. Highway safety and transport impacts**

- 14.1 Policy 80 supports developments where access via walking, cycling and public transport are prioritised and is accessible for all. Policy 81 states that developments will only be permitted where they do not have an unacceptable transport impact.
- 14.2 Para. 116 of the NPPF advises that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.
- 14.3 The application is supported by a Transport Report. The report shows there is no sustainability, safety or capacity reasons why the proposal cannot be permitted. Access to the site would be achieved off Grantchester Road. The site would benefit from the use of the existing access and car parking area. The statement has highlighted a maximum of 40-42 two-way vehicle movements will be generated per peak hour of the proposal, the statement then proceeds to outline the reality of movements is more likely to be 8 movements within morning hours a 14 per evening hours, this would equate to 84 daily trips. Overall, the transport statement shows a minor increase in traffic which would unlikely result in adverse impacts on the local highway.
- 14.4 The application has been subject to formal consultation with Cambridgeshire County Council's Local Highways Authority, raise no objection to the proposal subject to conditions as set out under paragraph 6.1 and 6.2.
- 14.5 Subject to conditions as applicable, the proposal accords with the objectives of policy 80 and 81 of the Local Plan and is compliant with NPPF advice.

## **15. Car and cycle provision**

### **15.1 Car and Cycle Parking**

15.2 The Cambridge Local Plan (2018) supports development which encourages and prioritises sustainable transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport. Policy 82 states that planning permission will not be granted for developments that would be contrary to the parking standards as set out in Appendix L.

15.3 The proposal does not fall within any criteria within Appendix L, however Appendix L states that parking provision will be approved on merit, on the basis of a transport assessment. Under Retail, culture, leisure and sports uses paragraph L.10 states outside the controlled parking zone, assessments will play a key role in determining the optimal level of car parking, for mixed-use developments and retail parks where linked trips might lead to a level of parking below the plan's standards.

15.4 No new parking is proposed as part of this scheme, but 20 spaces of the existing spaces will be dedicated to the use of the padel players. The provision of parking within the already existing car park is considered acceptable in green belt terms. In terms of provision of parking, officers were concerned how the parking would operate on rugby game days however the club has confirmed this will be monitored and ensured these spaces will remain free during these periods of time.

15.5 The site presently provides 30 cycle spaces. The proposal seeks to increase this provision to 36 spaces. Officers consider between the provision of 20 car parking spaces, 6 cycle spaces and the sustainable location of the site, parking facilities will be adequately provided to accommodate the parking needs of the users of the courts (maximum capacity is 20 people at once).

15.6 The proposal provides and integrates adequate cycle storage and is therefore compliant with Appendix L of the City Local Plan (2018).

## **16. Amenity**

16.1 Policy 35 of the Cambridge Local Plan (2018) and paragraph 135 of the NPPF (2024) seek to preserve the amenity of neighbouring and / or future occupiers in terms of noise and disturbance, overshadowing, overlooking or overbearing and through providing high quality internal and external spaces.

- 16.2 Policy 35 guards against developments leading to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life from noise and disturbance. Noise and disturbance during construction would be minimized through conditions restricting construction hours and collection hours to protect the amenity of future occupiers. These conditions are considered reasonable and necessary to impose.
- 16.3 The closest residential neighbouring properties front Fulbrooke Road and the northern section of Grantchester Road. The rear gardens of the properties along Fulbrooke Road will be circa 150-190m from the padel courts, the rear gardens of those on Grantchester Road will be 197m from the courts. The dwellings themselves will be further from the courts with properties on Fulbrooke Road being 180- 213m from the courts, and properties on Grantchester being 228m from the courts.
- 16.4 Much like any sport, Padel has the potential to make noise. The application is accompanied by a noise assessment. The assessment sets out the parameters of the court's usage. The courts are to be used between 07:00am to 10:00pm daily, the courts would not be used outside of these hours. The noise assessment established existing noise levels on Fulbrooke Road, where measurements were taken every 15 minutes. The noise assessment then measured noise levels from an active padel court (in St Albans) during play where LAeq were measured at 55dB at 2m from the court edge, with a L<sub>max</sub> of 60-84 dB. The below table shows the results of predicted noise levels at the site.

Source	Predicted noise levels at window of most affected residential dwelling		Predicted noise levels in garden of most affected residential dwelling	
	L <sub>Aeq,T</sub> (dB)	L <sub>Amax</sub> range (dB)	L <sub>Aeq,T</sub> (dB)	L <sub>Amax</sub> range (dB)
<b>Court 1</b>	29	34 – 58	29	34 – 58
<b>Court 2</b>	29	34 – 58	30	35 – 59
<b>Court 3</b>	29	34 – 58	30	35 – 59
<b>Court 4</b>	29	34 – 58	30	35 – 59
<b>Court 5</b>	29	34 – 58	30	35 – 59
<b>Combined (simultaneous)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>34 – 58</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35 – 59</b>

- 16.5 When applied to the site, it was found the predicted noise levels would be below the guidance levels of what is considered acceptable under BS8233:2014 (Guidance on Sound Insulation and Noise Reduction for Buildings.) and the World Health Organisation document for Community Noise (19910). It shall be noted the environmental health department have been consulted on this application and have not raised any concerns in relation to the predicted noise levels of the proposal. Therefore, as



suggested by the assessment, the proposed development would unlikely have adverse noise impact on neighbouring properties.

- 16.6 Policy SNNP12 of the Newnham neighbourhood plan (2025) refers to the Protecting Residential Amenity. The policy protects residential amenity in terms of overlooking, visual domination of neighbouring properties (through areas extensively using glass), unacceptable pollution levels from constructing and using the proposal, and disturbance arising from traffic movements to and from the proposal. In terms of overlooking, it is unlikely the proposed development would have this impact on neighbouring properties due to the separation distance between the site and the residential properties. Likewise with the use of glass on the elevations of the courts, as it is not likely the glass from circa 150-197m away will cause any visual intrusion to neighbouring properties. In terms of pollution which may arise from the construction period of the courts, officers consider the temporary construction period would not adversely impact neighbouring residents as the works will be taking place some distance from these properties. The level of traffic to be generated by the proposal and subsequent usage of the scheme is considered under section 14 of this report.

- 16.7 The proposal is considered to adequately respect the amenity of its neighbours and is considered that it is compliant with Cambridge Local Plan (2018) policy 35 and SNNP12.

## **17. Other matters**

### *17.1 Live Compliance Case*

- 17.2 There is presently a live compliance case on the site for structures which have allegedly been erected without planning permission. The compliance team have received notification of a potential breach and are investigating the matter. Please note officers will not be able to discuss or comment on the case until such time a conclusion has been reached.

## **18. Planning balance**

- 18.1 Planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise (section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38[6] of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 18.2 Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. The proposal would constitute inappropriate

development in the Green Belt. The land upon which the proposal is sited is not grey belt because it provides a strong contribution to Green Belt purposes (a), (b) and (d) as set out in NPPF para 143. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances (VSC's). The siting and design of the Padel courts would result in visual and spatial harm to the Green Belt, particularly through the height, location and design of the domed roofs but also in relation to the sides of the courts. A visually dominant and cluttered appearance of the site would result from the proposal. This is demonstrated in key views submitted by the applicants. The applicant has put forward VSC's. The NPPF advises that VSC's will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

- 18.3 Other harm arising from the proposal relates to, firstly, its failure to respect the environmental character of the protected open space, being contrary to CLP (2018) policy 67, and secondly, the siting, scale and massing of the proposed padel courts. The scheme would introduce a dominant roofed form and cluttered appearance to the site, diminishing its pleasing open character. These design elements would adversely impact the visual amenity and character of the open space and its valued role adjacent to the urban edge of this part of Newnham and the countryside setting. Protected views within the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan would be disrupted and harmed as a result. The proposal is contrary to CLP (2018) policies 8, 55, 56, 57 and 59 and policies SNNP11 and SNNP15 of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (2025).
- 18.4 Whilst the application would give rise to various benefits, including in relation accessibility, social and health, these are not considered VSCs and are generic to the sport. There is no compelling financial or economic benefit for the Rugby Club that constitutes a VSC; its survival is not secured by the grant of planning permission. The proposal would support a growing sport within the City and would significantly meet a deficit in Padel court provision. The provision of 5 courts would help meet a wider City need and is a significant benefit but does not in and of itself amount to a VSC when considering overall harm. In the planning balance, Officer's consideration is that the benefits of the scheme do not amount to VSC's and do not outweigh the cumulative harm that would arise to the Green Belt, the protected open space and character and context of this part of the City and Newnham.

*Overall*

- 18.5 In conclusion, having taken into account the provisions of the development plan, NPPF and NPPG guidance, the views of statutory consultees and wider stakeholders, as well as all other material planning considerations, the proposed development is recommended for refusal.

## **19. Recommendation**

### **19.1 Refuse** for the following reasons:

1. The proposal would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would result in harm to it by virtue of the siting, height and design of the Padel courts. The harm would be both visual and spatial and arise particularly through the height, location and design of the domed roofs but also the sides to the courts. A visually dominant and cluttered appearance of the site would result. The benefits put forward for the proposal do not constitute very special circumstances and are not sufficient to outweigh the cumulative harm that would arise to the Green Belt, the protected open space and character and context of this part of the City and Newnham. The proposal is contrary to CLP (2018) Policy 4 and chapter 13 of the NPPF 2024 'Protecting Green Belt Land'.
2. The site is a protected open space of environmental and recreational importance. The visual impact of the proposal, by virtue of the siting and design of the padel courts, would significantly harm the character of the protected open space, contrary to policy 67 of the Cambridge local plan (2018).
3. The siting, scale and massing of the proposed courts would introduce an intrusive built form into the middle of a valued protected open space, failing to adequately conserve or enhance existing identified views across it and harming its environmental and spatial character and qualities to the detriment of the setting of the City. The proposal therefore fails to positively respond to the surrounding context and is contrary to policies 8, 55, 56, 57 and 59 of the Cambridge Local Plan (2018), policies SNNP11 and SNNP15 of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan (2025) and chapter 12 (Achieving well-designed places) of the NPPF 2024.