

Havant Borough Council
Planning Department
By email planning.development@havant.gov.uk

8TH October 2024

Dear Sirs

Planning Application APP/24/00405 – Response to applicant updates dated 25th September 2024

Havant RFC (HRFC) welcome the above document which in most areas confirms things which were understood to be agreed in earlier discussions, but which were not explicitly defined in the original application documents.

However, some of the statements made were misleading, suggesting that the impacts to HRFC were no more than superficial, and these need to be corrected for the record.

The numbering and page numbers refer the Technical Note lodged by Portsmouth Water appearing on the planning portal on Sept 25th 2024 – excerpts from the document are in light blue and red text.

3.1 Alignment Overview (p3)

This refers to the **old** Pitch 4 – Pitch 4 is not old, it is very much an ongoing requirement for HRFC and would have been used for matches, as well as training, last season had HBC reinstated the previously vandalised posts, as requested, It was, however, marked out periodically to aid training, which continued to take place.

Having access to 3 full size grass pitches is absolutely necessary to HRFC to accommodate all training and game activities, without seriously overloading the pitches. This is exacerbated by Pitch 4's tendency to become very waterlogged in the mid-winter months, putting pressure on the other 2 pitches. Even In it's current condition Pitch 4 specifically provided opportunities to host Autumn matches, allowing HRFC funded maintenance regimes to bed in on Pitches 2&3, and in Spring, when Pitches 2&3 are getting 'tired'. Parts of it could be used for training activity in the intervening periods.

HBC's own Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) published in April this year, has listed as it's first key issue, under the Rugby section, as the following:-

"1. Havant Rugby Club pitches are currently overplayed by 17.75 match equivalent sessions per week, and this rises to 25.50 MES per week in 2042. To assist in meeting the current and future

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MES demand there is a need to improve the capacity of MES on grass rugby pitches with piped drainage, sand banding and maintaining and managing the pitches properly.”

The full document can be found at <https://www.havant.gov.uk/media/9836/download?inline>

The confusion may have arisen because there was an ‘old’ Pitch 5 in the North West corner of the field, which was a dedicated u12 pitch, with posts, which again was rendered unusable after those posts were not replaced around 7 years ago. The area has continued to be used for mini rugby activity and it still remains an aspiration of HRFC to re-establish the u12 pitch at some point. We understand the area will be lost to HRFC during the proposed works due to the haul road and open cut and that HRFC activities will need to be accommodated elsewhere.

It is good to see that work alongside Pitch 3 will only be undertaken in the off-season to maintain a 5m safe clearance along the touchline – the 3m clearance by the in-goal area can be mitigated with padding.

The transposition of the road and the open cut along the Western boundary is academic to HRFC given that we have to endure the loss of P4 in both designs. Although the change will bring the deeper excavation zone further into Pitch 4 emphasising the need for any renovation work to be completed thoroughly and managed to address any subsequent settlement.

3.4 Pre Application Consultation

18/01/24 – Consultation meeting (p5)

“HBC noted that any proposed improvements would need to be approved by HBC as the landowner, who would bear the responsibility for maintenance.”

What is not recorded is that HRFC stated that if Pitch 4 was upgraded HRFC would cover the additional maintenance costs – as we currently do on Pitches 2 & 3 (to prevent them deteriorating further). The annual regimes to improve resilience are the same whether the pitches are drained or not, however Pitch 4 needs more fundamental levelling work to be done first to reduce it’s tendency to waterlog in the middle of the season.

10/04/24 Follow-up consultation meeting (p5/6)

“HBC noted:

- An independent agent is to be appointed to manage all claims for compensation and requests for improvements to be made to the playing fields and pitches”

HRFC have not yet been contacted by an Agent since the meeting.

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“- A pitch use strategy is being produced and will be issued to POR / WAB once approved.”

The PPS was published in April

“- Pitch 4 has not had posts installed this season and will likely become a training area going forward instead of a dedicated pitch”

HRFC agree pitch 4 has not had posts this/last season, this is because HBC failed to replace them after they were vandalised, despite multiple requests. HRFC have been required to work around this situation in '23-24 and will need to again this season. This is before any work on this project starts. Pitch 4 must be returned as a dedicated pitch in the future, as indicated in the HBC PPS.

“- HBC's preference will likely be for all pitches / playing field areas impacted by the works to be reinstated to current condition (without improvements to drainage etc.)”

HRFC are surprised that HBC are not taking this opportunity to ask Portsmouth Water to improve Pitch 4 in line with their own published PPS recommendations, especially as HRFC have agreed to cover any extra annual maintenance required.

Post Submission Consultation Response – Havant Rugby Football Club (p7)

Point 1

HRFC remain concerned that the extended red line boundary might result in contractors employed on the works using the wider area to accommodate other operational support activities. This could affect the pitches, or part pitches, which need to remain available to HRFC at all times during the works.

Point 2

Pitch bookings bear no relation to the true usage. Based on previous guidance from HBC grounds team in 2013, HRFC were only asked to book pitches when they required remarking – HRFC were never advised subsequently that this approach had changed, until the April discussions.

HRFC/HBC have now agreed a licence to use all the marked pitches on a season by season basis.

The more thorough analysis of actual usage is reflected in the HBC PPS is a better reference point for the true usage, and all parties at the consultation meetings were aware of this.

The remaining space, including 'Dingley Dell', has never been bookable space, HRFC use these spaces as public open space. They are now indispensable to HRFC delivering the training and matches required, particularly on Sundays with the recent rapid growth in junior, girls and women's rugby. However, the new licence does recognise our use all of these areas, in addition to the pitches. The 'Dingley Dell'

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activities will need to move to the proposed smaller interim area on Pitch 4, thus displacing all other activities from there.

It is good to note that Portsmouth Water have agreed to cover additional HRFC expenses in booking additional hours on the RFU Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) and any evidenced loss of earnings incurred during the period of the works.

4.5 Removal of W2 Air Valves (p11)

It is good to hear that the proposed change will leave no permanent features in the shaft W2 location, which would restrict HRFC, and trust that the change can achieve technical clearance with Portsmouth Water .

5. Next Steps (p11/12)

4) & 5) Disappointed not to see HRFC listed here and we formally request that Portsmouth Water continue to treat with HRFC as an independent stakeholder.

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Yours sincerely

Gordon Brember – Facilities Director, Havant RFC

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