

# Planning Application 24/02890/FUL Development of Padel Courts and other works at Exeter and Hertford Sports Grounds, New Marston

Response to statutory public consultation by New Marston (South) Residents' Association.

I write as Chair of the New Marston (South) Residents' Association (NMSRA, [nmsra.org.uk](https://nmsra.org.uk)). The NMSRA Committee was informally consulted by the Colleges as they developed their proposal in 2024. Committee members and some local residents also attended the public consultation arranged by the Colleges in 2024. The Association has recently solicited the views of local residents and has examined the planning application in detail as the prelude to this formal response to Oxford City Council.

The Association has been in existence since 2002 and represents about 750 households in New Marston.

## Context

The two College sports grounds form part of New Marston Meadows, an important local heritage asset that includes a SSSI of European importance. Most of the riverside meadows that form the core of the Meadows are owned by the University of Oxford and its colleges. The Association has also fought hard over the years to see the Meadows better protected. The recent action by the University on the retirement of the previous tenant farmer at Park Farm to strengthen the management and sensitive control of the Meadows, in effect, to establish a re-wilding regime to protect the important flora and fauna of the area is welcomed by the Association. As the archaeological study undertaken as part of the planning application shows the sports fields still carry some remnants of the medieval ridge and furrow palimpsest and we understand that the University is also seeking to study and protect that element of the heritage of the Meadows. The Association understands that the combined Botany and Zoology Department of the University now has several research student projects underway using the Meadows as their field study base.

## The Application

The Association recognises that the Colleges have already acted to support the local community by offering occasional use of the sports fields for community use, principally for local primary school children, young people's football matches and for Oxfordshire Village cricket. This is welcomed locally. It also recognises that the proposed development has the potential to bring other benefits to the local community. For example, the provision of lighting along the Oxfordshire Cycleway (currently unlit) at the eastern end of the Hertford grounds parallel to Purcell Road would make it safer for pedestrians to walk along the route.

The community also sees benefit from being able to use the new sports facilities and café, since amenities in New Marston are currently relatively scarce. We also welcome the intention to reduce anti-social behaviour that is likely to result from renovation and the greater use of the site and use of ground keepers. The NMSRA recognises that the area in question is currently designated for sports use and its redevelopment will encourage physical activity, which is a positive.

Nonetheless, the NMSRA has also identified several concerns with the application as it stands:

If Oxford City Council is minded to approve the application, the Association advocate that strong, enforceable planning conditions are applied. The Association concentrates on 4 main issues.

## 1. Intensified usage of this site

The proposed intense usage of the site is more than the Association had previously expected. The implied intensification of sports use will raise from the current level of occasional college matches on Wednesday afternoons in term time (24 weeks a year), practice times and some community use at weekends to almost year-round intense activity on the site. In previous discussions between the Colleges and the Association it was never mentioned that the Padel courts would be used for national and international competitions, alongside college and local usage for 362 days of the year extending into the late evening. The proposal will change what is considered locally to be a low, acceptable level to activity at such a high level that the nature of the locality and the quality of life of neighbouring households would be severely impacted. The Association's concerns fall mainly into concerns about traffic / travel and access, light pollution and noise and their impacts on the quality of life for households in New Marston and the impact on New Marston Meadows and its users. In particular, intensification of: vehicular traffic movements and vehicle parking in and around the site); by intensification of noise and light pollution from the sports fields (particularly for households in Purcell Road, bottom of Edgeway Road and more widely in the locality); and potentially severe impacts on the heritage and wildlife in New Marston Meadows and the SSSI as well as the enjoyment by walkers seeking their rural ambience.

- If planning approval is to be given the Association would expect the planning conditions significantly constrain the level and times of activity being envisaged by the applicants.

## 2. Travel and access

There are two issues regarding travel and access, namely, servicing the site and parking.

We are concerned that large vehicles (construction traffic, coaches) will cause a nuisance to residents, damage to the footway to Park Farm, and to ditches and hedges both during construction and during operation of the new sports facilities. The Association assumes that servicing the proposed cafe and the new facilities will generate regular delivery traffic movements.

- If planning approval is to be given the Association would expect the LPA to place strict conditions on heavy vehicle traffic and movements on the footway between Edgeway Road and Park Farm.

The high likelihood that parking will spill over from the site onto neighbouring roads, where inconsiderate parking by visitors already blocks residents' driveways at weekends. We do not agree with the applicant's assessment that this is 'likely to be improbable'. Members of the public from beyond New Marston and from outside Oxford - are inevitably likely to drive to the site.

- If planning approval is to be given the Association would expect parking on nearby residential streets would be strictly controlled (including at weekends) although the Association has heard local views that the CPZ relaxations on Saturdays and Sundays should be retained to accommodate their weekend visitors.

The safety of the intersection between Ferry Lane and Edgeway Road where vehicles using the site cross the cycle path is already an issue of grave local concern. This junction is currently already perilous owing to drivers approaching it at speed down Edgeway Road. The sight-lines for vehicles at the junction are poor. Neighbours report near frequent misses between moving vehicles, walkers and cyclists. Increased use of the lane by vehicles will raise the probability for future accidents. We draw the planning authority's attention to Active Travel's Standard Guidance, provided in the submissions to the application, which states that 'pedestrians and cyclists should be prioritised at side road crossing points' (para.2.11). We ask that this is addressed as part of the consideration of the planning application and, if approval is given, is implemented before construction begins and maintained thereafter.

Vehicular access to the site is difficult, requiring travel along residential roads. The only vehicular access to the site is via a narrow track (the footpath extension of Edgeway Road). The University of Oxford Estates Department has recently blocked the turning circle on the footway (near Park Farm).to prevent unauthorised parking near Park Farm. The Association understands that the University Estates Department is in active negotiation with Oxford County Council with a view to introducing a lockable bollard (near the end of Edgeway Road) to prevent all unauthorised vehicular traffic on the footpath.

Increased vehicle usage could negatively impact walkers' enjoyment and safety. We are particularly concerned about the safety implications of extra vehicles using the track, which pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles will of necessity share. Active Travel's Standard

Guidance addresses minimum and maximum lane widths for shared use between motor vehicles and cycles, and cycles and pedestrians, respectively (paras.2.11 and 2.12) but not for all three. We would ask the planning authority to address the shared use of this track which we see as an especial risk inherent in the application.

- If planning approval is to be given for the proposal the LPA should ascertain the state and viability of the closure proposal of the footway (between Edgeway Road and Park Farm) being sought by the University and how the contradiction between University policy and the Colleges' proposal can be resolved.

The Association believes that a rigorous Construction Management Plan must be prepared and properly implemented if the development is approved. This should prohibit vehicles above a certain size on the footway and that any damage by construction to the Meadows and local roads be remedied by the applicant through planning conditions.

### 3. Light pollution

The light spill outwards and upwards (up to 25 metres high) from the sports courts will be very obtrusive, especially on winter evenings. At the very least we suggest that the courts should close at 8pm with all lights off by 9pm in winter, and that court lights could be turned off earlier if matches finish earlier.

We are also concerned at how the lighting will affect wildlife such as bats, and the nature of the SSSI of New Marston Meadows 50 metres west of the site. The Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) made recommendations on methods of lighting to minimise ecological impact, *but has not assessed the final plans*.

With the regard to the lighting of the *site*, the recommendations have to a point been adopted (although the chosen method, bollards, were the least favoured option in the EIA on ecological grounds but are probably understandable in terms of safety and security).

The application is aware of ecological risks of the lighting of the *sports courts*, and has sought to address this in terms of seeking to minimise horizontal light spill within the site. However, the EIA says that further consideration would be needed if lighting affected trees being used for bat roosts, and this would seem to be needed. No consideration is given as to whether and if so, how the New Marston Meadows SSSI might be affected by the light spill from the sports courts, at up to 25 metres high extending above any screening trees. The planning authority might wish to obtain a further assessment of this before granting approval.

### 4. Noise

Noise from the padel courts: residents are concerned that the courts will produce considerably more noise than is currently the case from the site – especially since padel is a notoriously noisy sport. This will be exacerbated by the proposed more intensive usage of the site. Neighbour concerns about excessive noise created by new Padel facilities is being

reported in the national press. Winchester City Council's Environmental Health Officer considers that Padel courts in its area are a noise nuisance and will be issuing notices under section 8 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

We would additionally ask for a condition that no amplified commentary or music is permitted on the site, for example accompanying training or competitions, given the site's semi-rural nature and its being adjacent to a notably quiet residential neighbourhood.

### Damage to the green nature of the site

The site would be irrevocably changed for those who currently appreciate it as it is, undeveloped and pleasant to walk around. The site forms part of the city's green belt and blue-green infrastructure.

### Further recommendations

The Association understands the need to refurbish the site and the community benefits that may result, but we remain very concerned about the implications of the development at the currently proposed level of use and activity. To proceed, the development should bring net positive gains for the community. In addition to our suggestions above, we believe that the community would be more receptive if:

- The footway next to the dark cycle path is built early on.
- A detailed management plan for construction is made available as soon as possible.
- There is a mechanism put in place by which local residents can raise issues and have them addressed.
- There is more clarity on the community space proposed as part of the development, and how it will be made available to community members, e.g. who will be able to use them, for what purposes and on what terms etc.
- During construction, work has been proposed to take place 6 days a week. We request that on Saturdays, construction should stop at 1pm with no deliveries on Saturdays, as was the case for the Oxford Brookes development at Clive Booth nearby.