

Design & Access Statement

The Rejuvenation & Expansion of Newbury Community Football Ground, Faraday Road



1.0 Introduction

Newbury has a thriving footballing community comprising numerous well established formal and informal clubs, associations and teams. The game has hundreds of local dedicated players ranging from over 6's girls to men's and women's senior league teams.

The proposed improvements to Newbury Community Football Ground will revitalise a major sporting asset providing much needed facilities for the community in Newbury, which are crucial maintaining and growing participation and to the health and wellbeing of present and future residents.

The current ground was established in 1963 and despite the best efforts of a dedicated voluntary group is in desperate need of expansion and improvement to satisfy local demand. There are no publically accessible 3G or 4G football pitches in Newbury, for which there is evidence of strong demand— according to Sport England's standards, a town the size of Newbury should have four such facilities. The proposal is to greatly improve the quality, design and area of the Ground for football other ancillary sports such as, a free-form running/walking circuit and cricket nets. In short, the intention is to create a public sporting facility that residents of Newbury will be proud of.

The new pitches will accommodate a greater intensity of use, satisfying the significant current demand and encourage higher levels of sport and physical activity by local residents. Exercise is at the heart of local and national strategies to improve health and wellbeing and reduce obesity. Football is the nation's most popular outside sport, but it suffers from woeful under-provision of suitable facilities in Newbury.

The Ground is an Asset of Community Value (ACV) and also safeguarded in the Core Strategy as both Green Infrastructure (CS18) and a Cultural Facility for Sport (ADPP2).

This application is in complete harmony with the Ground's status and the Council's strategies to both enhance the London Road Estate and improve recreational and sporting facilities and thereby health & wellbeing.

Newbury Community Football Group (NCFG) is a not-for-profit Community Organisation representing Newbury's football community of several hundred players, support staff and well over a thousand dedicated parents. A petition to protect and enhance the Ground attracted over 5,500 signatures.



Aerial View of the current Ground

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Current Situation

Newbury Football Ground is a popular facility that has for many years been used by the full spectrum of the local football community, including formal teams of all ages and both genders competing in a variety of leagues.

Until halfway through the last decade, the Ground was in a state of severe neglect. In 2006, at the invitation of West Berkshire Council, Newbury Football Club assumed responsibility for operating and maintaining the Ground on behalf of the community. Since then, without any public funding, a group of volunteers have maintained the pitch to a high standard such that on numerous occasions it has been ranked as one of the best in class by Berks & Bucks FA.

There is massive local demand, but use of the Ground is limited by its capacity of one pitch and high maintenance grass surface (as opposed to all-weather).

Uncertainty over the future of the Ground arising from West Berkshire Council's attempts to close it has curtailed the community's ability to deliver improvements. As a result, despite the best efforts of volunteers, the clubhouse is somewhat worn-down. Although Newbury is the "capital" of West Berkshire, on a like for like basis the Ground does not compare well with the facilities at Thatcham or Hungerford or other towns in Berkshire, all of which are located close to their respective town centres and public transport.

Standards imposed by the FA means that an accessible and well equipped facility is essential if teams are to progress upwards. For example, Newbury Ladies FC is elevated to the Southern Region Premier Division having previously won Southern Region Division 1 (North); on talent alone the team would continue their progression.

This equally applies to other teams.

The opportunity to progress is crucial to maintain participation by young players; put another way a glass ceiling resulting from lack of facilities acts as a major disincentive to commit to the sport, particularly by youth players and seniors. This is counterproductive to increasing health and wellbeing through physical exercise and sport.

This planning application seeks to revitalise and expand the facility.

As well as regular matches and practice sessions by children's', youth and adult teams, the ground hosts spectacular events. These include football competitions and penalty shoot-outs, which attract hundreds of young players. In 2016 the Ground was home to 'The Big Match', a major footballing charity event which attracted circa 1,000 people including numerous celebrities (Razor Ruddock, Kelly Smith, Mikele Leigertwood, Jimmy Glass, Ampika Pickston and Jay James.) raising £58,000 (<http://www.thebigmatch.co.uk/previous-years.html>).

As witnessed by Richard Benyon MP, AFC Newbury Boys & Girls annual competition in 2017 attracted nearly 300 players. There is an opportunity to increase this type of use for the benefit of Newbury as a whole.

Newbury has produced its fair share of famous footballers, including Theo Walcott, Charlie Austin and Faiq Jefri Bolkiah. The improved facility will give young players in Newbury an opportunity to become future icons of football.



In need of improvement - the current frontage of Newbury Football Ground

1.0 Introduction

1.2 Proposal: Need & Opportunity

West Berkshire Council's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy seeks to improve Health & Wellbeing by "*reducing childhood obesity*" and encouraging "*residents to be more physically active.*" The proposed enhancement of Newbury's community football ground is at one with these objectives.

The Council's Newbury Vision and Core Strategy seek to both improve sporting and leisure facilities and regenerate the London Road Estate.

"Newbury will be a place that provides high quality events, leisure and sporting activities together with a range of leisure, arts and heritage facilities and a built and natural environment that makes Newbury a great place to live, work, learn, visit and enjoy." (WBC Newbury Vision - Culture, Leisure and Sport – Opportunities to grow)

"New developments will make provision for high quality and multifunctional open spaces of an appropriate size and will also provide links to the existing green infrastructure network" (CS.18)

"Existing community facilities will be protected and, where appropriate, enhanced.

These include leisure and cultural facilities, which contribute to the attraction of the town for both residents and visitors." (WBC CS ADPP2)

The Ground's use extends to hundred of regular players of all ages and both genders. Use is only limited by capacity and the high maintenance needs of a single all-grass pitch. In 2016 over 5,300 people signed a petition to protect the future of the Ground and a recent survey by Newbury Community Football Group, which is submitted as part of this application, provides compelling evidence of need. Sport England has assessed that Newbury requires between three and four 3G/4G pitches.

To promote maximum participation through ease of access it is important that the community ground is located close to Newbury town centre, as is achieved by other towns in Berkshire.

Catering for an aspiration to succeed is imperative to maintain and grow participation in all sports, particularly football. Newbury Football Ground is the championship ground of choice for West Berkshire.

This application presents the ideal opportunity for Newbury to have a much needed first class sporting facility without cost to the public purse.

1.0 Introduction

1.3 Proposed Pitches - 3G & 4G

3G and 4G are the standard pitch types required by the majority of football leagues and encouraged by Sport England. These pitches provide an all-weather durable surface for practice and match-play. They do not suffer the limitation of grass pitches which are insufficient to meet local demand on weekdays, evenings and weekends. The proposed pitches will be used by all age-groups and both genders.

4G Pitches

4G artificial grass combines the newest and most revolutionary yarn and tuft design technology to create exceptionally high quality, low maintenance football pitches that meet the highest standards. 4G pitches are laid onto a shockpad and do not require sand or rubber infill. No infill means less maintenance. No rubber infill means a more ecologically friendly surface that looks and feels about as natural as you can get.

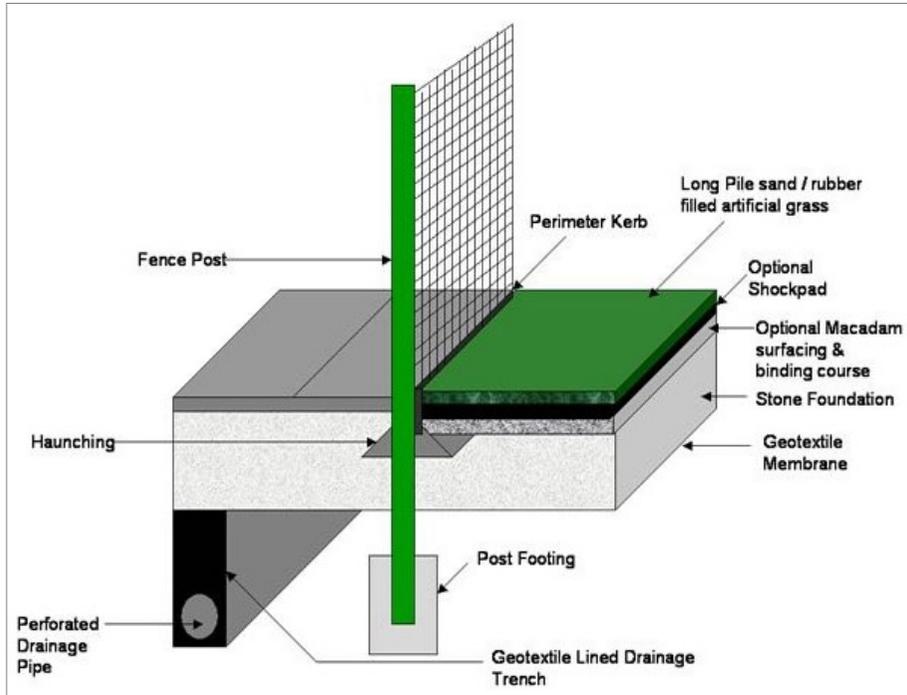
3G Pitches

3G artificial grass for football has a pile height of between 40mm and 60mm. The carpet is in-filled with a mixture of sports-grade sand and rubber to provide the required shock absorbency and playing characteristics. Carpets with pile heights below 50mm are laid onto a shockpad to achieve the correct dynamic response. Pile heights 50mm and above can be laid on a shockpad but do not have to be. They can be laid directly onto a free-draining stone sub-base (dynamic base) as the infill materials will ensure that the required playing characteristics are met and maintained.

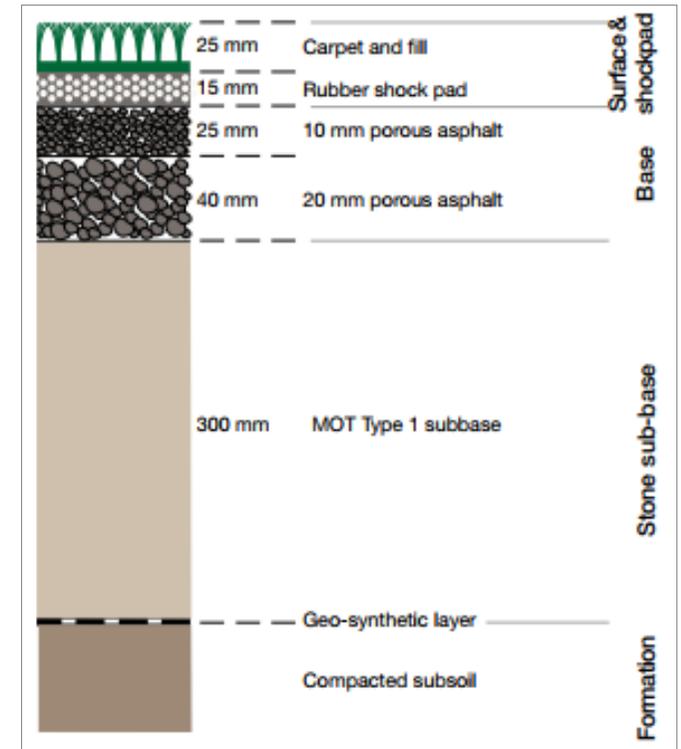


1.0 Introduction

1.4 Pitches - 3G & 4G



3G Pitch Technical Design



Typical build-up for an artificial surfacing system



Artificial 3G Grass



Artificial 4G Grass

2.0 Access

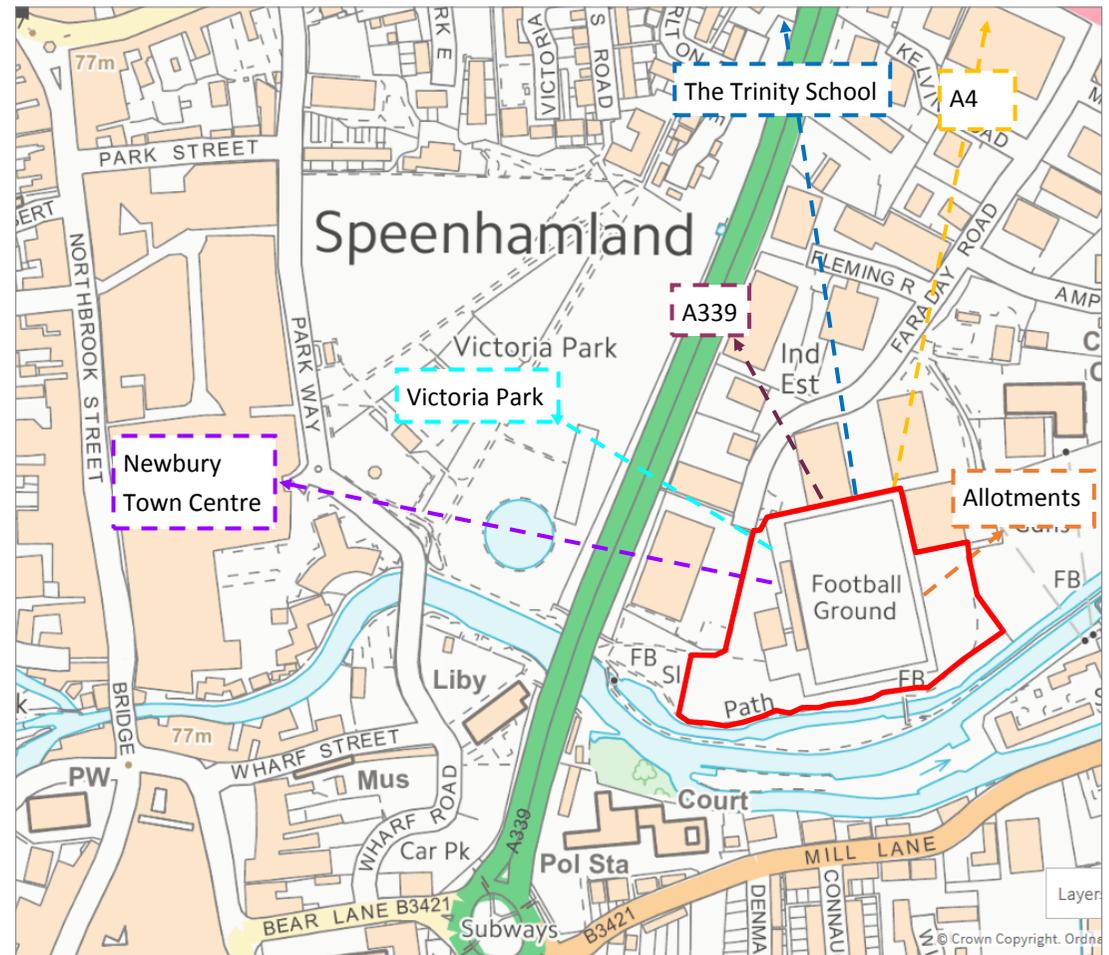
2.1 Location

It is a commonly held principle of planning that sports facilities in a convenient and sustainable location will encourage greater use. This is evidenced by other towns in Berkshire.

Being adjacent to Newbury Town Centre and with a direct link to Victoria Park “green lung”, the location is ideal to maximise use by the community and to encourage linked-trips to and from the main shopping & leisure area.

It is accessible by every means of transport which will increase use, particularly by younger players who rely on pedestrian and public transport or whose parents will have an opportunity to drop off en-route to the Town Centre. Proximity to Town Centre will facilitate enhancement of the Ground’s existing community leisure venue (subject of a separate application), which is already popular for celebrating special occasions and as a local meeting point. This will make an important contribution to economic sustainability.

The proximity to Victoria Park and the Canal is complementary as it provides the relatives and friends of players with an opportunity to participate in other recreational activities.



Map 1: Location of Newbury Football Grounds

2.0 Access

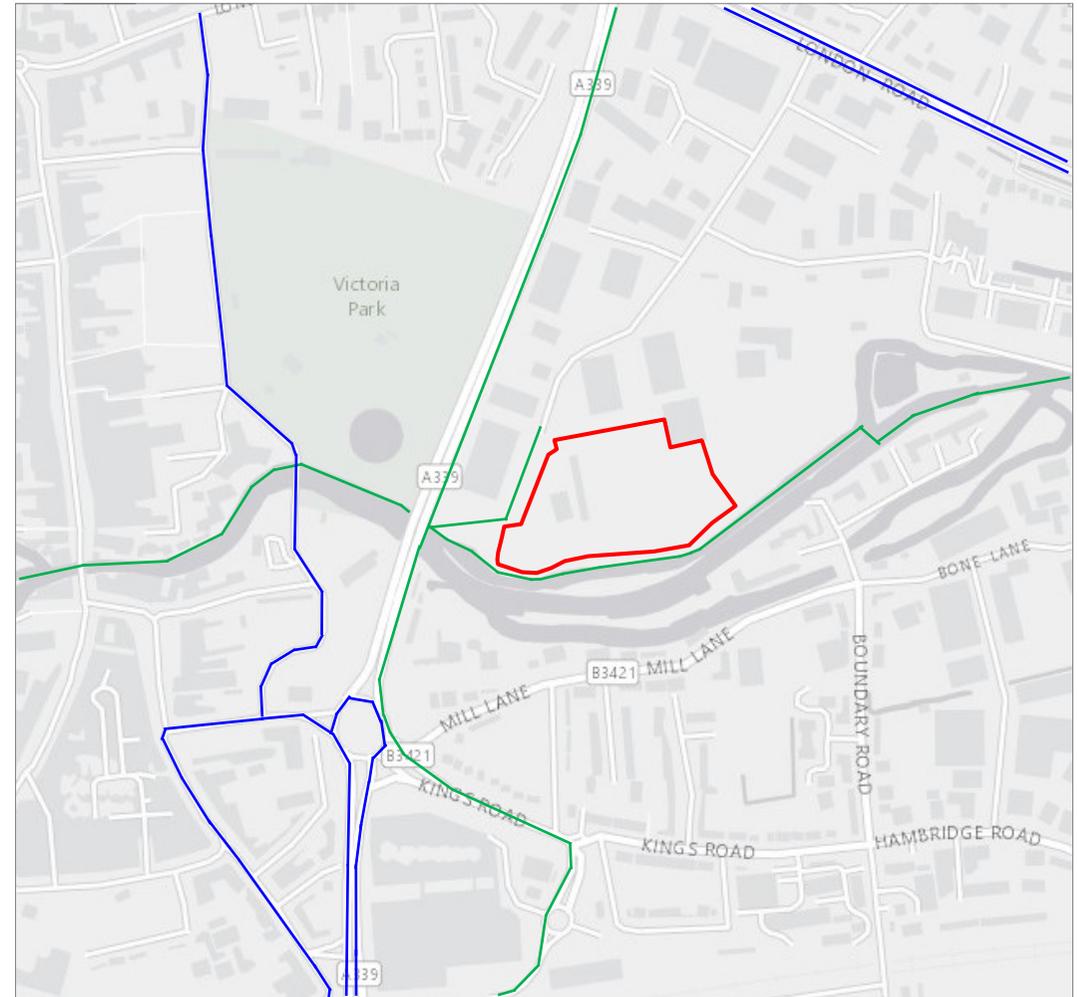
2.2 Public Transport

Located in the London Road Estate and on the edge of Newbury Town Centre, the Ground benefits from being accessible by all modes of sustainable transport.

Pedestrian and public transport access is of particular importance to young players. In this context, the benefit of close proximity to a safe pedestrian route alongside the canal and to the local cycle network, cannot be over-stated.

Newbury is a transport hub for both rail and bus. From the Town centre the Ground can be accessed by foot or cycle in a few minutes.

Along with many other districts, West Berkshire has experienced significant cuts to its bus service. This adds considerable weight to locating the Town's main football facility in a sustainable location.



— Cycle Routes

— 1/2 Hourly Bus Service

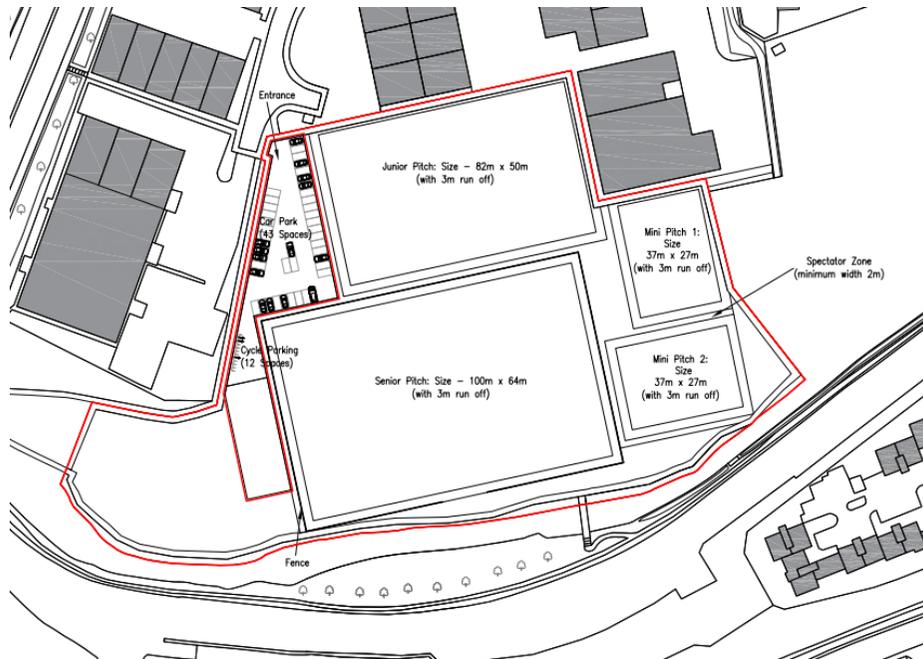
Map 2: Sustainable Transport

3.0 Design

As well as football, the proposal scheme will cater for ancillary sports activities which could include cricket nets and hockey. It is also proposed to include an open free-form running/walking circuit with exercise equipment that could potentially link into Victoria Park.

The proposal is to create four 3G/4G pitches to cater for all uses, age-groups and genders:

- Senior 100m x 64m
- Junior 82m x 50m
- Two mini-pitches 37m x 27m



Proposed layout



Small 3G football and hockey pitch with flood lighting



Full size 4G football pitch with flood lighting

4.0 Planning Policy

4.1 Asset of Community Value (ACV)

West Berkshire Council has awarded Faraday Road Football Ground ACV status, the criteria for which proves that the facility is of significant value to the community.

The application for ACV (a copy of which is included with this planning application for reference), contains a detailed statement setting out the benefits of the Ground and its importance to the local community. The proposal scheme seeks to improve the facility and immediate area and thereby the Asset of Community Value.

Whilst it is ultimately up to the Planning Authority to apply planning judgement to determine if an ACV listing is a material planning consideration, paragraph 70 of the NPPF guards against the unnecessary loss of “valued facilities”. Local and national policy promotes enhancement of green facilities.

There are very many appeals and decisions which conclude an ACV is material in determining a planning application, for example appeal reference 3153219:

“The Government’s Community Right to Bid: Non-statutory advice note for local authorities October 2012 advises that local planning authorities can consider whether listing as a ACV is a material consideration in determining a planning application, taking into account all of the circumstances of the case. In this particular case I regard the ACV as an indication of the local support for the premises having a function which furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. In this case, the pub’s importance as a local darts venue with regular live music and charitable activities furthered the social interests of the local community. It provided an environment distinctive from other drinking establishments in the area, according to the Council’s reasons for why the pub meets the definition of an ACV. Therefore I consider it to be an important material consideration in this appeal and this was agreed by all parties at the Hearing.” (appeal reference 3153219, paragraph 13)



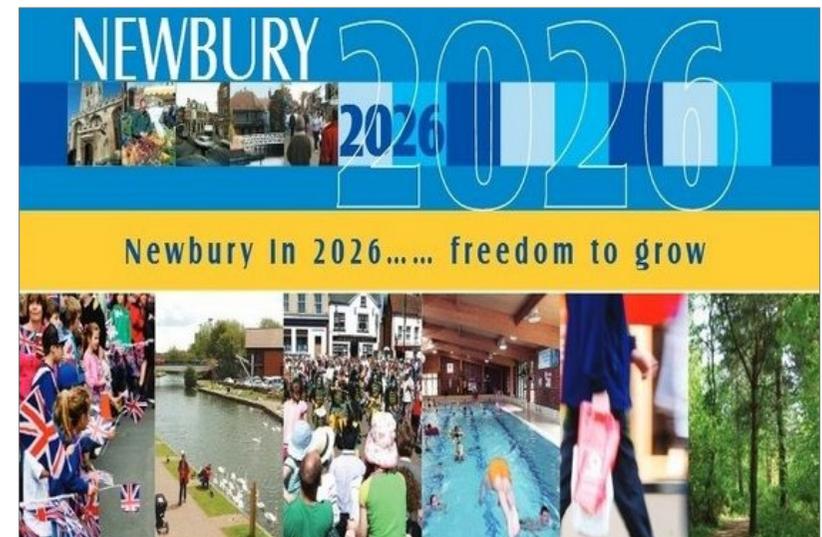
4.0 Planning Policy

4.2 Newbury Vision 2026

The Newbury Vision, which is an adopted document and through references in the CS a material planning consideration, sets out the Council's and community's aspirations for the future of Newbury. One such aspiration is for Newbury to "preserve and enhance existing areas of open space". Newbury Football Ground is a large area of formal public open space (specifically defined as "Green Infrastructure" in the CS) in the town and makes a significant and positive contribution to the Green Infrastructure of Newbury and West Berkshire.

Moreover, the Newbury Vision aims to increase opportunities for the growth of recreational and sporting facilities in the Town. As one of the Town's principal facilities, improvements to the Ground will provide a very positive and considerable contribution to this aim.

Another aspiration of the Vision is to ensure that the London Road Estate contributes to the town's Green Infrastructure, which this application will self-evidently achieve.



4.0 Planning Policy

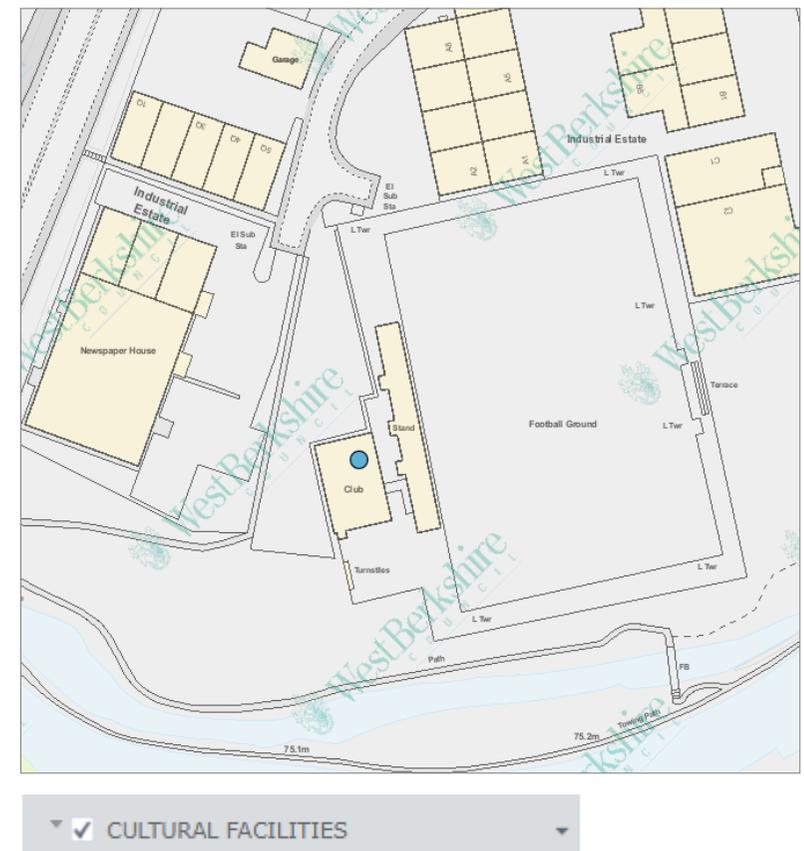
4.3 West Berkshire Council's Core Strategy

The Core Strategy sets out the Council's priorities and objectives in terms of land use planning. The use of Faraday Road Football Ground is firmly protected by planning policies.

4.4 Area Delivery Plan Policy 2 (ADPP2)

"Existing community facilities will be protected and, where appropriate, enhanced. These include leisure and cultural facilities, which contribute to the attraction of the town for both residents and visitors."

West Berkshire Council's interactive map identifies Newbury Football Ground as a Sports Stadium Cultural Facility (map 3). The proposed enhancements directly achieve a main aim of ADPP2, in that it will improve and enhance a significant Cultural Facility.



Map 3 : Cultural Facilities

4.0 Planning Policy

4.5 CS18 - Green Infrastructure (GI)

Newbury Football Ground is identified in Local Planning Policy CS.18 as a vital part of Green Infrastructure in West Berkshire. The Policy is unambiguous:

*“the districts Green Infrastructure will be protected and enhanced” and that
“Developments resulting in the loss of green infrastructure or harm to its use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted”.*

Newbury Football Ground is named as GI in paragraph 5.129:

*“Sporting provision ranges from established sports clubs with good facilities such as
....Newbury Town....Football Clubs....”*

CS.18 further explains why West Berkshire’s green infrastructure is essential for the vitality of the area;

“The multi-functional nature of GI in the District is important for many reasons. It contributes significantly to the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors, in terms of both visual amenity and for sport and recreation purposes”.

The proposal scheme will vastly improve the quality of this facility and result in a better social environment for those who live, work and play in Newbury’s catchment area.

4.0 Planning Policy

4.6 West Berkshire Council's Land Interest

The freehold of the Ground is owned by West Berkshire Council on behalf of the community.

The proposal to improve the facilities is entirely compatible with the Council's desire for London Road Estate to be improved.

This application should not be confused with discussions between the Council and its tenant Newbury Football Club. In particular, the Council, acting as freeholder, has terminated NFC's lease. Arrangements and negotiations between the Council and NFC (including a proposal by the Council that NFC should share a pitch with Thatcham) have no bearing on this application or on the community's right and requirement to use the public Football Ground.

It is noted that Sports England has on other occasions objected to the loss of formal playing fields, including through pitch sharing:

'The applicant had indicated in our meetings with them that areas within the rugby club boundary could be used to provide new playing field, by levelling areas too steep to accommodate a pitch. The approach suggested by the applicant would only be acceptable if the areas brought into use were genuinely new areas of playing field that could help accommodate an improved pitch layout. The plan (which I had not previously seen) now provided with the letter with the application shows how this potentially could be achieved. However, it is insufficiently detailed. It appears to simply shift the existing pitches around within a reduced playing field area. The relocation of the affected pitch would also reduce the ability to rotate and reposition all three pitches to overcome wear and tear, than is the case at present, and it is not clear that adequate safety margins can be maintained with the new pitch arrangement or where any new replacement playing field areas are being added.' (Case Officers Report—reference 15/02300/OUTMAJ)

The importance of local sporting facilities within West Berkshire is also evident through the refusal of the above application:

"The loss of playing field at Newbury Rugby Club and lack of a suitable replacement is considered to detrimentally impact on access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation which make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Therefore, this application conflicts with Policies ADPP2 and CS18 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006 - 2026 and the NPPF. (Decision Notice 15/02300/OUTMAJ , reason 4).

If approved, the improvements will be funded through private means without cost to the public purse. This said, the Council will be invited to consider co-funding so as to enhance its income from the land.

5.0 Community Need

In March 2017 a survey was carried out by NCFG to ascertain the views of the local community in relation to the quality and availability of the football facilities in the Newbury area. It is believed that the survey (full document submitted with this application) is the most comprehensive consultation about local football facilities ever carried out in West Berkshire.

An opportunity to participate in the survey was available online to the general public and it was specifically promoted to the football community, through direct contact, local press, radio and social media. Just under 200 responses were received including responses from 37 local teams and leagues representing the views of over 1,500 members of the local football community. An analysis of the responses concludes that there is a very high level of need and dissatisfaction with the local football facilities:

- Only 9% believe there are enough well maintained grass pitches
- Only 16% believe there are enough well maintained indoor football facilities
- Only 9% believe there are enough well maintained artificial pitches

In relation to the proposed improvement of Newbury Football Ground, 48% of respondents said that they would use the facility 1-2 days a week and 34% said they would use it more than 3 times a week.. 60% of respondents want artificial (3G/4G) pitches.