

Note on amendments to Policy EN40 and supporting text following discussions with Sport England

October 2022

Background

Policy EN40 of the East Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2 allocates the former Rushden and Diamonds FC Stadium site for employment use. The supporting text to Policy EN40 recognises that the loss of the stadium requires suitable mitigation in accordance with the NPPF.

Playing Pitch Assessment Report (September 2016)

The Playing Pitch Assessment Report identified the Nene Park/ Rushden Exhibition Centre, which is the stadium facility built as the home to Rushden and Diamonds FC in 1992, as a disused/ lapsed site. This reported that the Club folded in 2011. Kettering Town FC then used the stadium for 18 months until 2012, running costs were significant and Kettering Town were unable to continue to use the facility. Since then the stadium stands unused and unmaintained.

For football pitches the report concluded that:

- There is a current shortfall on adult pitches, youth (11v11) and youth (9v9) pitches. Spare capacity exists on mini (7v7) and (5v5) pitches.
- Factoring in future demand results in shortfalls in adult pitches, youth (11v11) pitches and youth (9v9) pitches.

Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (October 2016)

The Rushden and Diamonds Sports and Exhibition Centre is considered in the Action Plan. This provides the following information:

Current Status: Three poor quality adult football pitches, lapsed site. One pitch is a stadia pitch, the other two are not. The stadia pitch was the home ground of Rushden and Diamonds FC and has stood empty since November 2012. Understood some community play still occurs on a pitch.

Recommended Actions: Explore opportunities to bring the whole site back into use to meet identified shortfalls in the Assessment. If bringing the site back into use is not feasible or sustainable or disposal of the site is inevitable it must meet the requirements of the second criterion of paragraph 74 (*now 99*) of NPPF. This requires replacement provision of an equivalent or better quantity and quality within the boundaries of Irthlingborough.

Sport England Representation

Through the Regulation 19 consultation Sport England objected to Policy EN40 because, as drafted, the requirement in the supporting text implies mitigation only applies to the stadium site and not the other playing pitches which form part of the site and the requirement for mitigation is in the supporting text and not the policy.

The representation recommended that the policy included the following provisions:

- Mitigation for the loss of playing pitches (and ancillary provision) unless it can be demonstrated that the provisions are surplus to requirement in line with NPPF paragraph 97 (*now 99*); and

- Replacement leisure provision in line with NPPF paragraph 97 (*now 99*).

Discussions between NNC and Sport England

NNC met with Sport England to discuss resolving this objection. The following modifications are proposed to address the concerns raised by Sport England.

Supporting Text:

Amend paragraph 10.52 of the LPP2 as follows:

The Former Rushden and Diamonds FC Stadium (site 3, Nene Park), was demolished in 2017. **The site was identified as a lapsed site in the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (PPS) (October 2016). The PPS identified that the site contained three poor quality adult pitches. The PPS recommended that opportunities to bring the site back into use were explored to meet identified shortfalls. However, if this is not feasible or sustainable or disposal is inevitable then the PPS sets out that requirements of NPPF paragraph 99 must be met. The PPS states that this requires replacement provision of an equivalent or better quantity and quality within a suitable location.** The loss of the **playing pitches and ancillary facilities** stadium requires suitable mitigation (i.e. alternative provision, unless it can be demonstrated that the stadium site is **they are** surplus to requirements), in accordance with NPPF paragraph 97**9**. **Account should also be taken of the findings of any subsequent Playing Pitch Strategy.** Replacement leisure facilities are anticipated to be developed in accordance with the Healthy and Active Lifestyles Strategy through the masterplans for the major strategic sustainable urban extensions.

Add the following criteria to Policy EN40:

- **Mitigation for the loss of the playing pitches and ancillary facilities, unless it can be demonstrated that the facilities are surplus to requirements in line with paragraph 99 of the NPPF.**