

**TOWN AND COUNTRY
PLANNING ACT 1990**

**Planning, Design and
Access Statement**

**Planning Application by
West Ham United
Football Club**

**Retention of gymnasium
building at
Rush Green Training Centre
Rush Green Road, Romford
RM7 0LU**

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**Statement prepared on behalf
of the applicant
by
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On the 15 October 2021, the Council granted planning permission for the *'retention of temporary gymnasium building'* at the Rush Green Training Centre (Reference P1504.21). Condition 1 on the permission states that *'this permission shall be for a limited period only expiring on the 15 October 2024 on or before which date the use hereby permitted shall be discontinued, the building and associated works carried out under this permission shall be removed and the site reinstated to its former condition to the satisfaction of the local planning authority.'*
- 1.2 I am instructed by West Ham United Football Club to seek permission to retain this building and this report sets out relevant matters in support of the planning application.
- 1.3 Following on from the permission granted in 2021 for this building, and also for the Aganto media building, we contacted the Council's Officers in 2023 seeking guidance on the pre application consultation process and to progress proposals for permanent facilities at the Training Centre. We submitted details on the scale of development likely but await a response on the appropriate consultation process and on any comments regarding the scale of the changes proposed. At this point, the temporary gymnasium building is still required for the first team and in view of the delay on pre application consultation, it is necessary to seek permission to retain the building beyond the current expiry date.
- 1.4 The purpose of this Statement is to review the prevailing planning policies and the other material considerations that are relevant to the determination of the planning application, and to present a case for granting planning permission to retain the building. It is considered that a further temporary consent would be applicable covering the next three seasons. Future requirements can subsequently be considered as necessary, depending upon the pre application consultation process and future proposals for the site.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION AND PLANNING HISTORY

- 2.1 The Site is situated within Rush Green and the London Borough of Havering, has an overall area of 11.2 hectares (27.7 acres) and was formerly used as a private sports ground with a range of run-down buildings used as club facilities for Ford United Football Club. Since 2009 it has been owned by West Ham United Football Club, who have previously used it for youth and reserve team training, as well as being used as the main base for Grays Athletic Football Club. The Site is now used as the main training base for the West Ham United First Team.
- 2.2 The Site is accessed from the A124 (Wood Lane) that forms the southern boundary. A large parking area is immediately adjacent to the access with approximately 160 parking spaces available.
- 2.3 In October 2021, planning permission was granted to the retention of the current temporary gymnasium building. The permission expires on the 15 October 2024. In granting planning permission, the Officer indicates in his Delegated Report:

'The application site is designated as being within the Metropolitan Green Belt where Government guidance and local planning policy encourages specified uses which have a positive role in fulfilling Green Belt objectives. The occupation of the site by West Ham United

ensures that the site continues to be used to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation in a manner that supports Green Belt objectives. The current proposals do not seek additional floor area on top of that permitted previously. The purpose of the current proposals is to provide necessary gym floor area whilst an extant permission is either built out or superseded by a further application to extend the main building/facilities. As with previous applications made the proposals are to be viewed as a temporary measure and not a permanent addition to the site.'

- 2.4 In addition, in assessing the proposal the planning officer states that:

'The use of the overall site as a sports ground plays a positive role in fulfilling Green Belt objectives and the gym building has been used in a capacity which supplements the existing facilities whilst more permanent extensive works are progressed. It is understood that COVID-19 and the relative uncertainties surrounding the pandemic contributed to delays to the implementation of the extant permission under ref: P0954.15. It is possible for development to be acceptable in principle and yet to still be unacceptable by way of its impact on the openness of the Green Belt.....temporary addition is not regarded as having a significant impact on openness. Accordingly, it is the opinion of staff that the overall impression of openness would not be harmed by a further temporary consent. In the absence of any undue impact to the openness of the Green Belt and on the basis that the development would be permitted on a temporary basis, no conflict with relevant policy has been identified. The development was observed at the time of the previous temporary permission and no material changes are proposed to its proportions or siting. Whilst demountable type units can have a transient and low quality appearance the structure observed at that time integrated well with the surrounding built environment. No objections were raised as to the visual impacts of the development. There is no evidence before officers to justify a departure from this view.'

- 2.5 In terms of amenity, the Planning Officer indicated that the position of the gym building and its use in association with the Club is unlikely to raise any amenity issues. It was acknowledged by the Officer that the proposals are supplement to the existing facilities and therefore the impact of the development on highways and parking are negligible.
- 2.6 There has been no material issues which would lead to a different assessment of the proposal to retain the building. Until pre application consultations with the Council's Planning Officer's can progress, the existing facility remains necessary and essential for the operation of the First Team.

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The temporary gym building (retaining the existing) is located to the west of the existing training ground building. The building is rectangular in shape, with a length of 30.1 metres and a width of 10.3 metres. The height to eaves is 4.2 metres, with an overall height of 5.9 metres at the apex of the roof. The building is accessed via a covered walkway leading from the existing training building.
- 3.2 The building, as is existing currently, is constructed with 40-millimetre solid composite panels in an off-white colour forming the walls and Upvc doors and windows. The roof is an inflatable structure and white in colour.



View of the gym adjacent to the Training Building



View of temporary gym building from training pitches

- 3.3 The purpose of the building is to retain the additional gym facilities for the West Ham United First Team as pre application consultations are progressed.

4. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The starting point for assessing development proposals is the Development Plan for the area. In accordance with Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications have to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Government advice, in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), is an important material consideration.
- 4.2 The Development Plan for the area consists of The London Plan (March 2021) and the Havering Local Plan 2016-2031 which was adopted in November 2021. This Local Plan was adopted after the previous decision for the gym building was considered as part of the Officer's assessment. Therefore, for the proposal, the key policies are within the latest Local Plan.
- 4.3 In terms of national planning policy, the main consideration, given the site's location within the Metropolitan Green Belt, is Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework published in December 2023. Paragraph 154(b) provides an exception to inappropriate development in the Greenbelt where it relates to the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport. Paragraph 155(e) also states that material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation) is not inappropriate provided it preserves its openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 4.4 The London Plan 2021 provides the Spatial Development Strategy and Policy G2 deals with the Green Belt, indicating that the Green Belt should be protected from inappropriate development where harm would be caused, unless very special circumstances exist. Policy D4 deals with good design and Policy G4 with open space. There are a number of policies also which deal with sustainable development.
- 4.5 Overall, the policies are unchanged since the previous approval and as set out in the Officer's Report on the current consent, there are no changes in circumstances which would lead to a different conclusion in respect of national and local policies. It is necessary to retain the gym building until such time as the pre application consultations can be progressed and more permanent development approved.

5. MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 As set out by the Officer in his Delegated Report on the current permitted building, the main consideration for this proposal is the new building and its impact and justification within the Green Belt. In considering whether these are appropriate, due regard has to be given to paragraph 154 of the NPPF.
- 5.2 Paragraph 154 makes an allowance for both the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and the current proposal is considered to meet this allowance. The need for the proposed development is clear as set out in this report and as discussed with officers previously.

- 5.3 Given the scale and nature of the proposal, it would '*preserve the openness of the Green Belt*', as per the second bullet point of paragraph 154 of the NPPF. This position is reflective of the previous planning consent for the building.
- 5.4 Should the Council take a differing view, then it would be necessary for the applicant to demonstrate '*very special circumstances*', as set out in paragraphs 153 of the NPPF. In this respect the previous conclusions by the Planning Officer remain relevant. Planning decisions should recognise the specific locational requirements of different sectors. In this instance the locational requirements of the Club for the gym at the training ground is clear and represents a *very special circumstance* for development within the Green Belt.
- 5.5 West Ham United Football Club is renowned for an impact which is far reaching, both through its footballing endeavors as well as its engagement within the local communities, its ethos and presence, which are firmly embedded within the East End Culture. The recent approval for a significant extension to the facilities at the Foundation site in Beckton represents a further substantial investment by the Club.
- 5.6 In addition to this, it should also be acknowledged that West Ham United Football Club as an overall Club make a significant contribution to the Havering area. The West Ham United Foundation, the Club's official outreach vehicle, is widely recognised as one of the leading social and community outreach organisations. That work spans across all of East London and Essex, West Ham United's Foundation continues to be proud to deliver a range of programmes and opportunities for residents in the London Borough of Havering. These include the following: -

Holiday Hammers: West Ham United's Foundation delivers Holiday Hammers in Havering. These courses are delivered during all school holidays and attract an average of 50+ children aged 5 to 13 on each course.

Player Pathway: A 10-week programme that is delivered to children (boys and girls) aged 5 to 13. The West Ham United's Foundation Player Pathway programme is part of the Academy Integration Initiative between the Foundation and Academy.

WHU Foundation Primary Stars: As part of the PL Primary Stars programme West Ham United's Foundation currently delivers in a number of primary schools in Havering. West Ham is delivering a wide range of initiatives which include areas such as, School Activation, PE, Healthy Schools Model and bespoke programmes for each individual school's need.

Down's Syndrome 21 Partnership: A successful partnership has been developed with Down's Syndrome 21; an organisation that supports physical activity for young people with Down's Syndrome. These sessions are delivered in Havering on a weekly basis with the Foundation engaging with multiple participants each week.

Junior Football: West Ham United's Foundation work with a number of grassroots football clubs in Havering to upskill and develop delivery.

Second Chance Academy: West Ham United's Foundation currently has two playing squads. This programme is delivered in partnership with the West Ham United Academy and SCL Education with regular activity at Little Heath (West Ham United's Academy Training

Ground). Learners study BTEC sport and participate in the SCL and English College Football League.

Holiday Activity Fund (HAF): Delivered in partnership with Havering Council to provide free sport activation during school holidays where healthy meals/food parcels for participants and their families are also provided.

Premier League Kicks: Community based sessions using the reach and appeal of West Ham United to engage children and young people of all backgrounds and abilities in football, sport, and personal development. Additional targeted mentoring support available through Jigsaw mentoring.

The Training Ground: Works with NEET young people aged 18 - 25 from East London, offering a structured 12 week programme of personal development workshops, physical activity, and one-to-one mentoring.

- 5.7 Notwithstanding that the applicant considers the development to fall within the exceptions in paragraph 154 of the NPPF, the proposal also represents *very special circumstances* for the purposes of paragraphs 153.

Design and Appearance

- 5.8 The existing building has a simplistic appearance due to its modest scale. The building is single storey and given the location of the gym and level of existing landscaping that already exists around the boundary of the site, would not appear overly visible or prominent. There would be no impact on views into the site from Rush Green Road.
- 5.9 The building is linked to the existing training building and is seen in the same context to the on-site facilities, so would not appear out of character or incongruous.

Access

- 5.10 The site currently has two existing accesses with the entrance to the site managed by the on-site security, which only allows authorised personnel into the parking area. Any non-authorised personnel are directed along the existing access to the site exit, with the same exit also being used by those leaving the parking area.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 It is considered that retention of the gym building is appropriate and much needed to retain essential training facilities for West Ham United Football Club. It is hoped that pre application consultation will be progressed by the Council and their response to the initial submission in 2023 is awaited.
- 6.2 Paragraph 154 of the NPPF provides exceptions for inappropriate development in the Green Belt, including development for the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport. The development proposed meets the test within the NPPF. The Council in approving the current building in 2021 accepted that the development is appropriate and that '*very special*

circumstances' do not have to be demonstrated. There is no change in the circumstances which would lead to a different assessment to that made by the Officer in 2021.

- 6.3 The building proposed has been designed to be considerate of the location within the Green Belt.
- 6.4 The proposed development accords with the guidance held within the 2023 NPPF and Policies contained in the London Plan and Havering Local Plan.