

**Statement regarding  
“Pitch relocation and improvement feasibility report”  
by the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) - LBR 2.44.1 - Feb 2017**

## **Introduction**

The IOG feasibility report was published after the Save Oakfield Society (SOS) Representation was submitted. We therefore wish to add comments on the further feasibility.

This further Statement considers whether the IOG Assessment has shown the NPPF paragraph 74 to be achieved, i.e. that: *“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: . . . the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location. . . .”*

## **Summary of key points**

- a. Like the previous assessments by Cundall and PJA consultancies, IOG does not show how the loss of Oakfield as existing open space, sports and recreation building and land can be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.
- b. Cundall, PJA and IOG did not examine the Oakfield pitches and facilities. Nor did they take into account the social contributions made by the clubs on Oakfield. Oakfield is defined by its club as much as its space. They could not therefore be certain that the proposed replacement provision would be equivalent or better than Oakfield.
- c. At present Oakfield is managed to a high quality at no cost to the Council by the tenant clubs. They have ample volunteers from helpers to professional executives. The cost of re-siting is very large indeed. This will include ground work as estimated plus the provision of two pavilions of the size and qualities of those presently on Oakfield, buildings, car parking, storage, fencing and other security requirements, cricket nets and so on. The work required would be spread over two years and probably cost around £10m. This would need to be completed and the grounds made ready before Oakfield is vacated. There is no indication how this would be achieved. Even if the capital cost could be obtained by developer bonds, the ongoing maintenance costs falling on the Council and the tenant clubs would be higher than on Oakfield and could not be guaranteed for the lengthy period required to assure the survival of the clubs involved.
- d. There is nothing inherently wrong with replacing an existing, established facility with a new one. But the Oakfield clubs and grounds form a coherent whole sports hub which is irreplaceable. It has taken over 25 years to nurture and develop the pitch qualities and ground ambience and associated facilities. The sense of ownership is paramount. This is strong because Oakfield is self-contained, self-managed

and secure. A move to Hainault and Forest Road grounds would remove the sense of ownership since the new grounds would be formed of a less secure, much larger and open expanse with tenant clubs deprived of a separately identifiable place to call home. The new ground will lack the 'soul' that makes Oakfield self-perpetuating and a cherished source of pride for its tenants and the community. The proof of this lies in the great number of objectors to its loss. On Hainault and Forest Road, maintenance and enhancement of the infrastructure will become a chore rather than a passion.

- e. No allowance is made in the proposals for future growth of sport and recreation. The demand will come from population growth in Redbridge and adjoining boroughs, particularly the projected increasing birth rates which will create even more demand on the clubs to manage youth development. The demand among the growing Asian population for cricket has been pointed out by the ECB. The Oakfield clubs run strong colts sections for children from 7 to 17. On the football front, the Bealonians FC in particular run 23 youth teams. The accessibility of the Oakfield location and its association with the Redbridge Sports Centre is convenient for parents and school users. This would be lost at Hainault and Forest Road.
- f. It is not at all clear how the transition between existing and new facilities would be controlled and managed. It will take at least two years (two full seasons) to prepare firstly the Forest Road Ground and then the Hainault ground – if all goes well. But as IOG point out, stones will be brought to the surface during ground work and the experience with the new ground at The Drive (the old PLA ground) is that it can take up to 5 years for cricket outfielders to be cleared of stones. It is pointed out by the ECB that cricket pitches improve over time with proper maintenance and use. It is very unlikely that new pitches can be brought up quickly to a standard that is acceptable in the semi-professional leagues of the cricket teams on Oakfield.
- g. The Hainault and Forest Road grounds form part of the Hainault Fields area which is safeguarded for mineral extraction. This is not safeguarded for nothing. There is a reason. The reason is that the minerals may be required by the GLA for the building work that will continue across London. It is therefore unsafe to assume that the 'protection' of these grounds afforded by their sports status will count for much. It must be borne in mind that the Council plans take away the covenant protecting Oakfield from housing. It is ignoring its listing as an asset of community value. It would remove its own protection from mineral extraction.

## Evidence

We will show that the proposals are unsound because the IOG Options:

A - do not 'replace' the open space, sports fields and facilities of Oakfield;

B – do not meet the NPPF paragraph 74 'quantity' criteria;

- C - do not meet the 'quality' criteria; and
- D – the proposal would not be deliverable nor sustainable;
- E - the process has been deeply flawed;
- F – the proposed location is unsuitable.

## A. Replacement of what?

- a. IOG does not tackle the fundamental issue that Redbridge does not have a surplus of playing field or pitches. The objections to the Cundall Report have not been rectified. The Council were advised last year and again this February by SE, The FA and ECB to identify more field space than available at Hainault / Forest Road but they have not sought to do so.
- b. There is no attempt to replace the magnificent Jack Carter Pavilion.
- c. Oakfield is not just a field in the ordinary sense. "Oakfield" is extra-ordinary. It is not just a green 'space'; it is a 'place' and a special place at that. The Council have not identified a replacement for this cherished place. They have merely thought in terms of space for pitches.
- d. As well as a ground, Oakfield provides a range of opportunities as a 'field' of activity. The planned replacement is meaningless unless the mission for the sport, volunteering ethos, community activity, social and organizational capital can be sustained too.
- e. Oakfield tenant club officers and other volunteers provide not just sport and recreation but also community services that add immeasurably to the social infrastructure of Redbridge. Nowhere in the IOG report is that touched upon. The Oakfield community contribution is ignored and no plan put forward to sustain that vital contribution.
- f. These social benefit arguments are reflected in research by Sport England, The Department for Culture, Media and Sport in:  
<https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/partnering-local-government/scenarios/how-does-sport-bring-communities-together/>  
[Understanding the Drivers, Impact and Value of Engagement in Culture and Sport Open in a new window](#) (PDF) (2010) and  
[Quantifying the Social Impacts of Sport and Culture Open in a new window](#) (2014).

## B. Quantity

- a. The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) confirmed that LBR does not have a surplus of playing field or pitches, reiterated in the Local Plan Submission at paragraph 6.2.8. The population growth of neighbouring boroughs has not been allowed for.
- b. The IOG intensification strategy will require high quality pitches that can be used frequently. But even if feasible, the poor drainage and water-logging on Hainault and Forest Road will obviate this and thus reduce pitch availability, as pointed out by IOG. The use of 3G football

- pitches seems to be a seductive argument. But the Oakfield football pitches are used morning and afternoon on both weekend days. This is possible due to the superb drainage on Oakfield.
- c. The intensification strategy cannot be applied to the cricket facilities. IOG has not been able to accommodate the necessary number of cricket pitches.
  - d. The reduction in pitches goes against LBR and GLA physical activity participation policies.
  - e. The proposal would leave two football pitches and a cricket square on Oakfield, surrounded by housing, a school and health clinic. The responsibility for pitch management and maintenance of the remaining pitches has not been explained. The Masterplan for Oakfield does not appear to be laid out to accommodate a full cricket pitch and two football pitches.
  - f. Ample space and flexibility is essential. Oakfield football pitches can be moved annually to reduce goalmouth wear. Cricket boundaries must move according to pitch positioning on the square. The proposed layouts are very tightly fitted into the available space. It is inflexible. This is exacerbated by the caravan site on the south side of the Forest Road site which also has a road running through it. All this reduces optimum utilisation.
  - g. Together with the Redbridge Sport Centre, Oakfield car parking provides a large total capacity with overspill arrangements that can cater for surges caused by festivals etc. The car parking shown on the three IOG Options is totally inadequate even for normal demand.

### C. Quality

- a. SE, The FA and ECB are not satisfied that the replacement being proposed comes anywhere good enough in quality to be considered as a replacement for Oakfield.
- b. As IOG confirm, the ground conditions on the proposed replacement site are poor. It confirms that it is undulating, has a river running through it in a culvert with the hazard of two raised manhole covers. It is a floodplain where surface water accumulates in wet weather, especially in the dips in ground levels. Much of the soil is highly compacted which prevents adequate drainage, so causing match cancellations and less overall capacity. The stone content throughout is high and this would be brought to the surface during improvement operations. There is debris under the surface from a post war housing estate, a disused changing block and an old roadway were demolished.
- c. The quality will deteriorate over time due to difficulties of maintenance.
- d. The history of pitch maintenance by the Council is very poor (as confirmed in the PPS and by IOG). Future maintenance resources for this are uncertain.
- e. Over and over again the IOG say: *"In all cases, there is little point investing in new facilities if the ongoing maintenance is not sufficient to keep the pitches at the required quality levels and the council will need to address this."* This suggests a note of scepticism!

- f. Oakfield is a secure site and suffers little vandalism. Most of the new site is open amenity (including dog walking). This makes pitch care even more difficult.
- g. Bealonians FC have a Main 1<sup>st</sup> XI Premier Status pitch which is separated from the other pitches by a built in Respect Barrier around the complete pitch which is attached to the Home and Away dug-outs. This is used for Cup Finals hosted by Bealonians for various different Leagues, AFA, Old Boys, VFA etc. Their very high quality facilities in the JCP include a laundry room, shower facilities for every dressing room, referee facilities including those for female referees and so on. The pavilion is two storied and has meeting rooms, refreshment facilities and a viewing balcony on the first floor which can be reached via a Stannah stair-lift. Nowhere in the Cundall, PJA and IOG Reports is the quality of such facilities assessed. Consequently, none proffer a proposal for the replacement of these facilities as enjoyed by the Bealonian players and club officials.

#### D. Not Deliverable nor Sustainable

- a. **Fencing:** The proposed replacement site is currently open to the public in its entirety. If the Old Parks Association ground is fenced off as proposed, public amenity would be lost.
- b. **Car Parking:** The proposed car parks in the three IOG layout options are woefully inadequate. There is no allowance for sharing overspill between the different clubs. This is exacerbated since the fenced off Old Parks part of the space would be unavailable to other users.
- c. **Jack Carter Pavilion (JCP) replacement:** The three options allow for the replacement of the Old Parks pavilion but only a relatively small pavilion is provided as replacement for the JCP.
- d. **Minerals:** this is referred to above.
- e. **Costs**
  - i. The set-up cost for pitch improvements and re-layout on the replacement ground is indicated by the IOG to be between £3.2m and £3.4m plus VAT. This is without accounting for the infrastructure of two new pavilions, roadways, parking, secure storage facilities for ground machinery and sight screens, new cricket nets, etc.
  - ii. Very expensive 'mole drilling' would be needed every 3-5 years to assist drainage.
  - iii. The Borough's leisure budget is to be significantly reduced. Neither Council nor clubs could afford the maintenance costs of pitches and outfields. Apart from the general drainage costs, the IOG estimate this as £7,000 – 8,000 per cricket square and £15,000 - £16,000 per adult football pitch. This is approximately 50% higher than the costs on Oakfield.

- iv. Operational finance for clubs would be much more challenging to achieve. The income streams from pavilion hire would reduce because of being sited at a less attractive, accessible, safe and secure location away from the community and transport hubs.
- f. **No Business Case:** no business case has been made for relocating and maintaining the Oakfield clubs and facilities.
- g. **Culvert:** the Borough revised its policy on Culverts after Representation from the Environment Agency. The culvert may be opened up and returned into a river. This is preferred by IOG. It would further limit the flexibility on the site and increase the casual amenity use by the community.
- h. **Volunteers & Participation**
  - i. Expanding on the point above, a ground with an identity (or 'soul') produces a feeling of 'ownership' and a culture of responsibility among club membership. In turn, the quality of a sports ground and its ancillary features, including trees such as those on Oakfield, depend on the quality and energy of leadership in the tenant clubs. The maintenance of club grounds, facilities and quality of services offered to the community, especially its youth, are better when the ground has an 'identity' and an obvious physical boundary. The Hainault and Forest Road site not only occupies a very large open area – which will not provide the ambience of Oakfield – but it is an extension of the even larger open area of the Fairlop Oak and London Marathon grounds. There will be no separate identity.
  - ii. The Old Parks FC, Bealonians FC and Oakfield Parkonians CC are all much larger clubs now than they were ten years ago. Their contribution to the life of Redbridge is accordingly greater. This in due in no small part to the attractions of Oakfield. This would be put in reverse if a move is enforced.
  - iii. The proposed site is less secure than vandal-free Oakfield. This would affect child and youth protection and participation.

## E. Process

- a. If the alternative(s) to Oakfield are evident the Council would have made their case years ago.
- b. At each stage, SE, The FA and ECB were not informed until the Cundall, PJA and IOG work was completed. No meaningful consultation on these assessments was allowed. Briefs were set by the Council. Each report therefore carries little weight.

## F. Location

- a. The suitability of the replacement location was not assessed by Cundall nor IOG.

- b. The additional distance for walkers to the new site would be 1,165 metres. (It's 1,091 metres from the Forest Road T junction with Fairlop Station). Worse, young local players who normally enter Oakfield from the Fencepiece Road entrance would have to walk as much as 2,740 metres (1.7 miles) further. (Measurements were taken with a measuring wheel and can be confirmed on OS Map 174 or Google maps.)
- c. There is a single bus route along the narrow Forest Road which would be inadequate on weekend match days. The pavement along Forest Road is very narrow and would be unsafe when used by teams arriving en masse. This is additional to the people traffic already going to the other large sports grounds to the east of Forest Road.
- d. Owing to its location and quality of facilities Oakfield is sought after by many clubs not having their own grounds. Both the Old Parks side and the Jack Carter side are fully used on both weekend days, mornings and afternoons for both football and cricket. The Old Parks ground attracts multiple clubs for ground hire. The Jack Carter side is used by various clubs in the cricket season. In Winter it is only hired to the large Bealonians FC club for adult and youth teams. Oakfield is used by schools and other organisations. The change of location to a less accessible, more exposed and less secure site would deter usage.

## **G. Overall Conclusion**

For those reasons and more, the Local Plan IOG feasibility study is unsound.

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10<sup>th</sup> May 2017