

Briefing Note – Maitland Park play equipment planning application

Introduction

1. This briefing note regards 2 planning applications submitted on behalf of the London Borough of Camden's Community Investment Programme to provide play equipment within the Maitland Park estate, Gospel Oak. The first application is a full planning application made under reference 2021/6108/P ('the Play Equipment Application'). The second is a minor-material amendment application to vary the conditions attached to planning permission 2014/5840/P (as amended by 2015/6696/P and 2019/4998/P; henceforth referred to as 'the Maitland Park permission') with which the boundary of the full planning permission (2021/6108/P) overlaps. This amendment application has been made under reference 2022/0007/P ('the Amendment Application').

Background

2. The Maitland Park permission was secured in March 2015 and allowed, amongst other things, the demolition of the gymnasium to the west of the former Aspen House and the re-provision of the play space as a multi-use games area ('MUGA'). Re-Providing the MUGA is a condition of the Maitland Park permission.
3. Following the Maitland Park permission being granted, it became clear that residents of the estate had concerns over the provision of a MUGA. It is not an option for Camden to not provide any play space, however, as this would result in a net loss of facilities across the estate, following the demolition of the gymnasium.
4. Efforts were therefore made, starting in 2015, to assess alternative options for providing play space within the estate that would be more agreeable to the estate's residents as a whole.
5. It should be noted that Camden could, if it chose, deliver the play equipment without planning permission. This is because the Council would benefit from permitted development rights set out at Class A, Part 12 of the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended). The Council have nonetheless sought planning permission for the works as a consultation exercise, to ensure that the views of residents are heard and understood.

Proposals

6. The proposals made via the Play Equipment Application are the culmination of approximately six years of consultation with the estate's residents. These consultation efforts included actively seeking the views of those for whom the play facilities are intended – ie children of 11+ years of age. They made it clear that they would like to see some exercise facilities provided, hence the proposal to provide a play and fitness trail that runs through the estate.
7. One of the main concerns raised about the MUGA was that it would unfairly impact upon a certain area of the estate and those who live within it, for example with regard to noise. The activity trail proposal, therefore, seeks to

mitigate this by spreading the equipment throughout the estate, meaning that noise impacts are not concentrated in any one area and are less intrusive overall.

8. The proposals put forward seek to meet the requirements of the Maitland Park permission with minimal impact on the estate's character, landscaping and residents. No alternative proposals have been deemed as successful in this regard as the proposals put forward by Camden via the Play Equipment Application.
9. An assessment of the proposals against the relevant policies contained in the Development Plan has been provided by the Applicant within the Covering Letter to the application (dated 14 December 2021). It finds that the proposals not only accord with but are strongly supported by the Development Plan and that therefore planning permission should be granted.
10. The Amendment Application then proposes to amend the Maitland Park permission to replace the MUGA with the play trail and ensure it is consistent with the Play Equipment Application.

Comments

11. 14 comments have been made on the Play Equipment Application. Only 1 comment has been made on the Amendment Application, which is a copy of a comment made on the Play Equipment Application.
12. The concerns raised within the comments are primarily to do with noise impacts and a concern that equipment will increase perceived anti-social behaviour ('ASB'). Many of the comments note that the existing play facilities attract ASB in the evenings and nights and state that by increasing the provision of play equipment, the problems with ASB will also increase.
13. One of the comments has been signed by the 'Maitland Park TRA'. It is important to note that this organisation is not a formally recognised Tenants and Residents Association, because it has not been quorate for a number of years, despite assistance from the Participation team. The group calling itself a TRA is not representative of the Estate, nor does it have the backing of Ward Councillors, and as such these comments should not be afforded the weight that those of a properly established TRA would.
14. One of the comments has been made by Cllr Kelly, as well as on behalf of Cllrs Quadir and McAnena. The councillors note their delight that proposals have been made "*after so many years*" and that many residents are pleased the needs of younger residents are being addressed. The Councillors do however note the concerns raised by those who have commented on the application. The Councillor's summary of the concerns raised by the estate's residents are replicated and responded to in Table 1 below.

Table 1

No.	Comment	Response
1.	The development, including the additional benches, and unsupervised play equipment, could attract even more ASB to the estate, including threatening behaviour and drug dealing.	Whilst acknowledging existing issues of ASB within the estate, there is no evidence to suggest that increasing the provision of play equipment will necessarily mean increasing problems of ASB. The proposals are to deliver play equipment in areas that are open and well-surveilled in accordance with planning policy. The alternative would be to propose a play space that is more tucked away, thereby reducing noise impacts to residents. Such proposals would clearly be more, not less, likely to attract ASB and would be contradiction of the Council's own guidance (as set out in the Design CPG, page 74), which recommends proposals maximise overlooking and are in visible locations.
2.	Trees have been / will be lost. It is also proposed that there will be a loss of additional green, grass areas, and natural space. Many residents do not want the play areas to be extended. They want their estate to have more trees, to be even greener and to have more biodiversity.	No trees will be lost as a result of these proposals. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been provided in support of the Application, and shows that no trees will be affected by the proposals. The amount of grassed area needed to deliver to the proposals is minimal when seen in the context of the wider estate and will not detract from the sense of openness and greenery. The Maitland Park permission is delivering improvements to the landscaping in the north of the estate, which will include planting that will provide biodiversity benefits. The proposals for the play equipment do not prevent Camden from making further improvements to the landscaping and planting within the estate, though it is not necessary nor appropriate for wider landscaping improvements to be proposed as part of the Play Equipment Application.
3.	The proposed development has the potential for making the estate far noisier, at all times of the day, night, early morning and weekends. The design of the estate means any noise travels, any noise echoes.	It is acknowledged that play equipment can generate noise impacts. However, Camden are required to provide play equipment in some form; not providing play equipment is not a feasible option. Previous proposals for a MUGA were criticised because they unfairly focussed the noise impacts on a certain area of the estate and the

		residents that live in it. The fitness trail proposals seek to mitigate and reduce noise impacts by spreading the equipment throughout the estate. The impacts of the proposals are therefore considered to be sufficiently outweighed by the benefits as to be found acceptable in planning terms.
4.	The proposed development could add to existing light pollution.	No lights are proposed as part of this application. There will be no increase to light pollution.
5.	There do not seem to be plans to address the unsightly concrete area at the south of Maitland Park Road / Villas by the statue and below. The area is neglected, ugly and can attract undesirable people.	For structural reasons it is not possible to propose any equipment directly on top of the garages in this location. However, colourful surface graphics are proposed to improve the look of this area, as well as a table tennis table. Both of these interventions are a direct response to consultation with young Estate residents who advised that these elements, in this location, will improve their play experience on the estate. This will help address the 'neglect' of this part of the estate by activating its usage and enhancing its visual amenity.

15. It should be noted comments have been made by a relatively small number of the estate's residents. It should also be noted that the consultation exercise carried out demonstrated a clear desire from young people to see more play and fitness equipment provided. It is an unfortunate truth that young people are not at all likely to comment on a planning application and that generally those that do comment on applications generally do so to object. The comments received should not, therefore, be taken to be generally representative of the views of the estate's residents, especially not of those for whom the equipment is intended to benefit most.

Summary

16. Camden is required to provide play facilities as part of the redevelopment of the northern part of the estate. The proposals put forward are the result of a very lengthy consultation exercise and represent the best and only solution for providing the play space whilst mitigating its potential impacts to residents.

17. Comments made upon the application have been acknowledged and considered. They do not, however, warrant any revisions to the proposals, which are in accordance with the Development Plan. The NPPF sets out that proposals that accord with the Development Plan should be approved without delay. For this reason, and because the comments made on the application have been responded to within this briefing note, it is considered appropriate for a decision to be made via delegated powers.