PROPOSED RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

**Proposal to install a 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School**

We are responding to the council’s consultation on its proposal to build a 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School.

We welcome the increased investment in football, which will encourage young people to take a long-term interest in the game and will help to ensure that there is more motivation for them to take exercise. However, we are aware that residents of Sevenoaks Road, Avalon Road and The Crescent in particular are angry that the change of use of the Maiden Erlegh field will have a substantial impact on the peaceful enjoyment of their properties.

The Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association (MERA) recognises that there is a demand for more 3G football pitches, but it is essential that if such pitches are provided, they should be located within an appropriate environment. We acknowledge that wherever such pitches are located within Earley, nearby properties will be impacted, in some cases unacceptably so. Where such impacts occur, these should always be mitigated to minimise the deleterious effects of the development for residents.

Our principal issues regarding the proposed development of the Maiden Erlegh School site relate to the proximity of the development to nearby houses, the additional traffic that the availability of the new pitch would generate, and the congestion and car parking arrangements that would be available for those participating or spectating in matches held there.

On balance, MERA has concluded that this site is not appropriate for the development proposed in terms of the proximity of neighbouring properties, not least because the noise from the increased usage of the playing field would become a nuisance, preventing residents from being able to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of their gardens with their families. This will inevitably devalue these properties and make them more difficult to sell. These residents will have their views of a green field eliminated, and additionally, they may be subject to additional nuisance of potentially noisy participants driving cars away late at night from their streets.

We urge the Borough Council to take seriously the negative impact of this development on nearby residents in particular and consider whether such a major change to their environment as envisaged would be likely to gain planning consent before committing any further expenditure in consideration of this application.

We would draw attention to the proximity of the new pitch to the residential boundary and the height of the field once it is levelled, and the impact of this on residents who will also have their view of the field blocked by the acoustic fence, which at this height, would be extremely intrusive for the Avalon Road residents living opposite.

If the decision nevertheless is to continue to evaluate the proposals, MERA would request that the following issues are taken into account.

**Traffic congestion and parking**

**Issues**

Research conducted by MBOS Residents in respect of the previous Laurel Park proposal estimated that the 3G football pitch proposals would generate at least double the amount of traffic, which meant that over 100 new car parking spaces would be required at that venue.

Although there are more parking spaces already in at Maiden Erlegh School, the number of spaces needed to accommodate the increased use of the field,together with existing school demands, exceeds the 126 car parking spaces that will be available under these plans. The numbers that have been projected to make use of the car park for football events would lead to overspill, which if not addressed, would result in the local shopping spaces and residential roads being used for parking. At weekends and some weekday evenings, all the spaces are already used to accommodate organisations hiring out rooms at the school on certain occasions, or for various school events.

The result would be an unacceptable amount of traffic congestion, with potential for cars being parked on all of the nearby surrounding roads, including Betchworth Avenue, Silverdale Road, Lancaster Gardens, Kennedy Gardens, Allendale Road, Lakeside, Andrews Road, Sevenoaks Road, Avalon Road, Moor Copse Close and possibly Radnor Road and Kenton Road.

Not only that, but such high amounts of traffic, including drop-offs and pick-ups, will lead to additional congestion, with the entrance to the school being a bottleneck for traffic tailing well back onto Silverdale Road.

Mitigations

1. A detailed analysis must be carried out of the number of vehicles that would be likely to use the school car park on football match days and training days, to include other demands for spaces by the school at the same time as well as those who hire the premises for other purposes over the school year.
2. Where there are insufficient spaces likely to be available on any occasion, an appropriate plan should be drawn up to accommodate the excess vehicles elsewhere on school property. If that is not possible in relation to any event, alternative arrangements should be made for those events that have caused the excess demand.
3. An annual plan would need to be drawn up by the Head Teacher and/or the Project Steering Group or its successor to identify those occasions where the number of parking spaces that could reasonably be expected to be required is clearly insufficient to accommodate the number of vehicles expected, and that measures be introduced to address these problems, including the prohibition of matches on those days. In the event of a planning application being successful, this requirement should be a condition of the planning approval.
4. The football clubs should also be required to encourage players and spectators to walk or cycle to these events where possible, or alternatively to use public transport. It should be noted that a frequent bus service exists to the school between Reading and Wokingham (service 4/X4) along the Wokingham Road, with access to the school through Maiden Erlegh Drive.
5. A further condition of any planning approval should be that Football Clubs, hirers of the premises and parents attending school functions must be informed that parking in The Parade is for shoppers only and must not be used.
6. An appropriate and effective plan to ensure that sufficient time is allowed between matches and other events so that the number of vehicles entering the car park is minimal when users are exiting and vice versa. Alternatively, the entrance point into the school premises should be widened to allow for vehicles to pass each other to avoid gridlock, although there appears to be limited room to achieve this.
7. On-street parking in this area should be kept under review to ensure that the new facility does not result in problem parking in nearby roads, and if it does, appropriate measures should be introduced promptly by the Highways Department and the Parking Enforcement Service.

**Floodlighting**

**Issues**

There would be a considerable increase in the use of the field under the proposal, requiring floodlighting to be turned on during the dark evenings. This will result in more frequent light intrusion into nearby properties.

There have been occasions in the past where the floodlights have been left on overnight, resulting in unacceptable disturbance to the residents of neighbouring properties.

Additionally, there are nearby bat colonies as well as abundant moths, which are known to be severely impacted by floodlights.

Mitigations

1. It is vitally important that the most modern floodlights are installed professionally to ensure minimal light intrusion into nearby properties. The number and angle of these lights must be carefully installed to achieve this aim.
2. Cowls should be fitted to the floodlights if appropriate to minimise further any light intrusion into properties.
3. Timers should be installed and activated to ensure that lights are extinguished automatically after 10pm every evening.
4. All practical measures are implemented to minimise the impact of the floodlights on the bats and moths living in the area.

**Noise**

**Issues**

The added noise from the increased use of a 3G pitch will impact nearby householders. We have received complaints of bad language emanating from those participating and spectating at football matches when older players are using the field. The acoustic fence that has been promised will assist with the noise levels in gardens, but it should be noted that a considerable amount of noise will still be heard at these locations. We believe that these may well be at higher than permitted levels.

The acoustic fence will be necessary if the development is to take place, but this will have a limited positive effect, and effectively, the installation of the fence will take away the view residents have of the field. Given that the field needs to be raised by approximately 5ft to level the field, residents complain that this is completely unacceptable.

MERA has also been advised that residents are concerned about the noise emanating from participants leaving the field as they walk home, which will become an additional nuisance if not controlled.

Mitigations

Acoustic fencing be installed to reduce noise to a minimum and site attendants be required to attend to regulate the amount of noise if this proves to be necessary.

Suitable vegetation be planted to obscure the view of the fence from the residents living nearby in Avalon Road.

Signs on the school premises should ask all those leaving the site to be respectful of residents by making their way home as quietly as possible.

**Artificial turf**

**Issues**

Artificial turf is not nature friendly. Birds cannot forage on artificial turf and its lack of absorbency means that there will be excess water run-off, with small particle release which could flow into nearby gardens. Microplastics contained within the water run-off would be likely to pollute these properties as well, which will be a danger to animals and to children in particular.

We are reassured to some extent by the guidance presented with the consultation documents regarding the use of higher quality infill materials because we have been concerned about possible carcinogenic materials being used. We would request that particular consideration be given to the materials used in the construction of the 3G pitch with the safety of players, nearby residents and the environment in mind.

Of course, artificial turf does nothing to assist Wokingham to achieve carbon neutrality, and this remains an environmental concern, given that the removal of the natural grass on the field takes away yet another means by which carbon in the atmosphere can be absorbed by vegetation.

Water run-off is also of concern because the area is poorly drained at present, and there have been flooding incidents close to nearby properties in the past. Given the increased water run-off from the artificial turf, it is imperative that the council investigate thoroughly the likely impact of this on the surrounding area.

**Mitigations**

1. The council must ensure the use of safe materials to be used in constructing the new 3G football pitch and that all current guidance is followed to ensure that our children are playing in safe conditions.
2. Measures be put in place to ensure that there is no water run-off into nearby properties.
3. An assessment of the existing drainage problems in the locality be made and the problems resolved, with the additional run-off from the new 3G pitch contained by suitable engineering remedies.

**Construction**

**Issues**

There will be considerable disruption for residents during the process of construction of the pitch. The nature of the construction is such that the householders of the properties in Avalon Road, and to a lesser extent, Sevenoaks Road, would suffer considerable inconvenience as a result of these works being carried out. The noise and the mess created by the construction vehicles as well as the increased traffic caused by lorries entering and leaving the site and using our residential roads is bound to cause disturbance and upset to those living nearby.

**Mitigations**

1. Construction vehicles entering and leaving the school premises should be routed to and from Wilderness Road using Silverdale Road and Betchworth Avenue. This is the main feeder road into and out of the estate and we wish to ensure that a condition of any planning permission contains this clause.
2. Construction vehicles leaving the site should have their tyres free of mud to ensure that a trail of soil from the site is not deposited on local roads.
3. Appropriate provisions are put in place to ensure that noise and disturbance during construction of the pitch are kept to the minimum.

**Conclusion**

We believe that while this proposed development will benefit Maiden Erlegh School and those who wish to play football, the changes proposed would have a negative impact on neighbouring residents and aspects of this proposal appear to be in breach of planning legislation.

In the event of this application being approved despite the views of the residents who are most affected, on behalf of Maiden Erlegh residents, we would request that all of the mitigations requested above are addressed, and that any planning permission granted is conditional on these mitigations being put in place.