

Reference	2382/APP/2023/2906
Location	BROADWATER LAKE MOORHALL ROAD HAREFIELD
Proposal	“Redevelopment of the site to create the Hillingdon Watersports Facility and Activity Centre including demolition of existing Broadwater Lake Sailing Club (BSC) clubhouse at the north of the lake and erection of a building including changing facilities, meeting rooms, storage, Workshop and seasonal worker accommodation (sui generis), activity shelters; installation of pontoons and slipways; boat shed; equipment storage huts; boat parking and racking areas; camping area; outdoor activity areas; ecological enhancement throughout the site; new pedestrian routes through the peninsula; landscaping including new woodland, dense vegetation screens and boundary treatment; access road; localised dredging and land reclamation; relocation of existing sailing area and creation of floating reedbeds within the lake; coach drop off and turning area; vehicle parking; cycle parking; and associated works”.
Key Planning Policy Designations	Green Belt, Mid Colne Valley Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – Metropolitan, Mid Colne Valley SSSI of National Importance, Colne Valley Regional Park London Canals SINC (eastern edge).

Planning Policy Team Comments

Green Belt

The site sits entirely within the metropolitan Green Belt and therefore relevant planning policies apply. National planning policy continues to place emphasis on the need to protect and preserve the Green Belt. However, a new ‘grey belt’ provision was introduced in December 2024 that enable Green Belt release under certain circumstances.

‘Grey belt’ is defined as *‘land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143. ‘Grey Belt’ excludes land where the application of policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.’*

The planning statement asserts that the tests for 'grey belt' have been met in line with the updated NPPF.

Firstly, the planning statement argues (paragraph 11.5) that the site represents Previously Developed Land as it was formerly used as a gravel washing / processing plant and a landfill for inert quarry wastes. It goes on to state that, '*Various structures remain present on and in the vicinity of the peninsula associated with the aggregate use including a weighbridge, aggregate hoppers, pad foundations and areas of hardstanding.*' (Paragraph 11.5) The NPPF glossary states, 'Previously developed land excludes: **...land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill... and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.**' As such, the site does not appear to meet the criteria for Previously Developed Land within the context of the NPPF definition.

Secondly, looking to the purposes a, b and d. The planning statement provides a short assessment on the purposes.

- Purpose A – check unrestricted sprawl: The planning statement argues that the site is surrounded by Green Belt and the proposed built form will be contained within the red line boundary and therefore there is limited sprawl to neighbouring settlements. It is unlikely that Harefield represents a 'large built-up area', however, the site currently constitutes wide-open space, providing a clear gap between settlements (Denham and Harefield). It could be argued that the designation of the site as a SSSI and Green Belt land has prevented the coalescence of these 2 settlements or at least has contributed towards the 'feeling of separation' and openness in the area. Nevertheless, the quantum of built development on the site is limited and therefore, it is unlikely that the scheme would contribute to sprawl.
- Purpose B – prevent neighbouring towns merging into one-another: The planning statement states that purpose B relates solely to 'towns' and therefore is not relevant to the site. However, as above, it could be argued that the site represents a significant area of open space separating 2 neighbouring settlements. It is unclear what the meaning of paragraph 11.9 is.
- Purpose D – preserve the setting and special character of historic towns: The planning statement states that there are no historic towns within the vicinity of the site and therefore purpose D is not relevant. This is not strictly true. The historic village of Harefield is covered by the Harefield Conservation Area and sits due east of the site. Black Jacks and Copper Mill Lock Conservation Area lies to the north of the site along the boundary of Troy Lake neighbouring the site. Without an accurate assessment of the openness of the lakes in relation to the

conservation areas it is difficult to assess whether the site actively contributes towards preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. The Harefield Conservation Area Appraisal notes that, 'Views to the surrounding open green spaces, all of which are designated as Green Belt, are important and these form part of the setting of the Conservation Area.' (Page 7)

It could reasonably be argued that the site does not contribute towards purpose d, however without an assessment on the impacts on neighbouring conservation areas it is difficult to make a clear judgement.

Thirdly, with regard to footnote 7, the site is a designated SSSI and is at risk of flooding (it primarily sits within flood zone 2 and 3). The ES Volume I Chapter 7 also confirms that there are priority habitats on the site including wet woodland and open mosaic habitat.

These designations would heavily restrict development in line with Local Plan policies DMEI:7 and DMEI:9, thus, preventing the grey belt test being met. However, the planning statement argues that the site-specific designations, whilst included within Footnote 7, do not provide strong reasons for refusal or restriction of development. The statement relies on a condition assessment carried out by Natural England in 2023, which found the SSSI as a whole in an unfavourable condition and the proposal involves several ecological mitigation and enhancement measures to improve the condition of the SSSI. Therefore, the statement concludes that the Proposed Development will not result in significant harm to biodiversity or to the SSSI (Paragraph 11.38) and it should not be a reason for refusal. This is in line with EIA submitted in support of the development that confirms the proposals will not have an adverse long-term effect on the SSSI.

If it is determined that the grey belt test has not been made, for reasons set out above, then Hillingdon Local Plan Policy DMEI: 4 applies. DMEI: 4 states, 'A) Inappropriate development in the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will not be permitted unless there are very special circumstances.'

The updated Planning Statement states that the proposal site meets the test for appropriate development in the Green Belt, by virtue of the fact the proposal represents facilities for 'outdoor sport and outdoor recreation' in line with NPPF paragraph 154. Further, the Planning Statement also asserts that Very Special Circumstances exist and therefore, 'any harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm resulting from the Proposed Development are very clearly outweighed by other considerations.' A Very Special Circumstances and Development Benefits Statement has been prepared to evidence this. The Statement claims that there is a very strong case for the proposal to be defined as 'appropriate development' due to the nature of the facilities provided.

There is significant evidence provided to suggest that the development will deliver social benefits for the borough; namely providing opportunities for children and young people, including those with disabilities, to engage in outdoor/water sports.

The economic case, is slightly weaker as the number of jobs created on the site is fairly low and it is unlikely, given the lack of public transport and pedestrian access, that there will be sufficient footfall generated to lead to spending in the local area. The environmental benefits also have to be weighed against the potential harm to the SSSI, Green Belt and protected habitat and so cannot be considered significant.

Nevertheless, there is a strong case that the social benefits of the proposal could outweigh the negative impacts on the Green Belt and thus be deemed Very Special Circumstances in line with the NPPF guidance.

Alternative Sites Assessment

The planning statement confirms that an Alternative Sites Assessment (hereafter ASA) was submitted in support of the formal planning application in September 2023. Since then, the design of the scheme has been amended and the ASA subsequently updated to assess whether there are any alternative available sites for the amended proposal.

As with the previous ASA the applicant stresses the importance of keeping all the activities on a single site and has ruled out the option of separating the water and land uses. Therefore, the short-listed sites remain the same as before.

The assessment of the short-listed sites follows the same scoring system as before. Whilst it is accepted that guidance relating to the preparation of ASA's is limited and an element of professional judgement is required, it is unclear why the proposal site, which has significant ecological designations, scores the same (0) as sites, which have no statutory designations. Clarification as to the scoring system would be helpful to understand why this is the case.

Paragraph 6.68 of the planning statement omits to refer to the ecological and landscape impacts the proposal would have on Broadwater Lake.

It would be helpful, if not already provided, to submit viability evidence relating to the Denham Quarry site demonstrating that it cannot be considered as a suitable alternative.