

P/2021/0680 Outline Planning Application for a new school on Nine Acre Field

There are many reasons to object to the Councils plan to construct a primary school on the field. These are detailed below in no particular order.

In brief, the loss of open green space is unacceptable in an area which is already suffering a deficit. Whilst the new plan shows an area of land that might become available for community use, there are no guarantees. The remainder of the field would still be built upon or asphalted over.

The school sports pitches will be located on the lower section of the field. As everyone knows, this area is waterlogged during the winter months, rendering it almost impossible to use. This means that the “public” open space will very quickly become reserved for school use.

The Traffic Survey was conducted during the March national lockdown so the vehicle movement and parking data is not an accurate representation of real conditions. The survey data should be declared null and void. An additional 189 cars per drop-off or collection is calculated, excluding buses and staff.

Traffic calming on Rhosnesni Lane (several rows of speed bumps) will cause traffic to back up potentially as far as Rhosnesni High School.

There is an increased risk of flooding due to a reduction in permeable landscape. The field is well known to be a very wet site, and the flooding on Rhosnesni Lane has been a reoccurring problem for many years.

Specifically, the plan is contrary to the following Council and Welsh Government policies:

Wrexham Council Unitary Development Policy

- Strategic Policy PS2 states that “development must not materially, detrimentally affect countryside, landscape / townscape character, open space or the quality of the natural environment”
- Strategic Policy PS3 states that “development should use brownfield land in preference to greenfield, particularly where greenfield land has amenity value”
- Policy CLF4 states that “Re-development of sports grounds, playing fields and informal open spaces for other uses other than sport and recreation will not be permitted”

Wrexham Council Deposit Local Development Plan

- Emerging Objective SO6 “seeks to encourage healthy, active lifestyles achieved by providing high quality green infrastructure including open space”
- Emerging Policy CF1 “seeks to protect, manage and enhance existing multi-functional open spaces, sport and recreation facilities”

Welsh Government TAN16 (Sport, recreation and open space) Technical Advice Note

- States that “open space, particularly with a significant amenity value, should be protected.” The TAN 16 definition of open space is “all open space of public value.....which offers important opportunities for sport, recreation... and can also act as a visual amenity. Areas which are privately owned have amenity value”
- Paragraph 3.7 states that “when playing fields are not required for their original purpose, they may be used to meet the need for informal recreation or amenity land in the wider community”

Planning Policy Wales Edition 10

- Section 4.5 “sets out the importance of recreational spaces for health and well-being”
- Paragraph 4.5.3 states that “formal and informal open green spaces should be protected from development, particularly in urban areas”.
- Paragraph 4.5.4 states that “all playing fields, whether owned by the public, private or voluntary organisations should be protected from development”.

Wrexham LDP 2013 - 2028

- EBH07a Gypsy & Traveller Site Selection

Site 208 Nine Acre Field – Reviewed 2014 & 2017

States that “Nine Acre Playing Field but not classed as POS. However, it is the Nine Acre Playing Field and is strategically important. There is also a shortfall of playing fields within this community. The loss of this facility to development is therefore considered unacceptable.”

Wrexham Open Space Audit - March 2016

- This states that “Maesydre ward has a deficit in amenity green space of -1.71ha (hectares) and for children and young people -0.11ha, when assessed by Wrexham Councils standard based on ward population.”

Nine Acre Field Draft Development Guidance 2004

- 6.2 Overall Conclusions states “The significant development of the Nine Acre Field would compromise its openness and be unacceptable in terms of open space provision.”
- 10.1 Transport Considerations states that “Vehicular access onto Rhosnesni Lane would be unacceptable because of restricted visibility to the east.”

It’s worth pointing out that whilst not strictly a planning issue, we know from previous FOI requests that in order to put a school on Nine Acre Field, the Council will be undertaking a land swap with the Catholic diocese. The Council will receive the St Marys school site, which it will sell for development. This planning application is therefore a backdoor sell off of a publicly owned asset to a private entity. Once the land swap is complete, the church will be free to do whatever they like with the land in the years to come.

The residents of Maesydre, Acton and Rhosddu (Grosvenor ward) place a very high value on this particular open space. Over the years, infill developments have seen the population increase, which in turn has placed a burden on what little open green space we have left.

If Nine Acre Field is built on, this irreplaceable green space will be lost forever, and the repercussions will be felt for generations to come.

The climate crisis and Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of green space to the health and well-being of urban communities everywhere, and Wrexham is no exception. The large number of objections submitted to the Councils Pre-Planning Consultation shows the strength of feeling around the loss of the field.