

# Parklands Residents' Association

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Clive Thomas  
Corporate Director for People, Planning and Regeneration  
Northamptonshire Borough Council  
The Guildhall  
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16 January 2007

Dear Mr Thomas

## **Complaint – Planning Application N/2006/1052 Parklands Middle School**

We are writing to you as the Corporate Director for People, Planning and Regeneration regarding Northampton Borough Council (NBC) planning application N/2006/1052.

We have a number of complaints regarding the handling of this application, in particular the contents of the officer's report submitted to the special planning committee on 15 January 2007. We have been shocked and appalled at the way this application has been handled, in particular the lack of respect for published NBC policies and procedures, and indeed the council's constitution.

Our first complaint is regarding the reporting of the public consultation undertaken by NBC during August / September 2006 regarding application N/2006/1052, specifically

- Nearly 350 written objections have been submitted regarding the Parklands application, yet these are not mentioned in the report.
- The objection from the National Playing Fields Association has not been included in the report
- The objections from the Parklands borough and county councillors, parliamentary candidate, MP, and MEP have not been included in the report or presented to the committee.

We would remind you that NBC's published policy on planning applications<sup>1</sup> states

"All representations, received by fax, letter or email, will be acknowledged within 10 working days of receipt. All representations should include a contact postal address and telephone number, where possible. All representations will be publicly available at those places where the presubmission or draft documents were made available, and where possible on the Council's website.

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<sup>1</sup> NBC Adopted Statement of Community Involvement

Representations received will be reported to the Council's Executive. Respondents will be informed of the result of the Executive meeting. A summary of all submissions received, the Council's response and resulting changes will be publicly available at those places where the presubmission or draft documents were made available, and where possible on the Council's website."

Furthermore

"All representations (whether for or against the development) will be taken into account when the decision is taken.

The Planning Committee meets every four weeks on Wednesday evenings, starting at 6.00 p.m. The Councillors have a written report on each application that is being considered, which includes details of how many letters have been received, and a précis of the main points they raise. Should a letter be received after the written report has been prepared, the main points will be summarised within a late addendum."

Having inspected the working file regarding application N/2006/1052 we know of at least 344 separate written objections to this application, the vast majority of which make specific reference to loss of the playing fields. It is completely undemocratic and totally unacceptable for the committee not to be made aware of these objections.

Based on Local Development Regulations, at the very minimum we would expect the officer's report to the committee to contain

- a) a statement of the number of representations made;
- b) copies of all the representations; and
- c) a summary of the main issues raised in those representations, or a statement that no such representations have been made.

Our second complaint is regarding the overall recommendation of the officer's report submitted to the special planning committee on 15 January 2007. Officers within the planning department are no doubt aware of the published policy regarding the disposal of playing fields<sup>2</sup>, which includes the following statements

"Where appropriate, playing pitches at surplus school sites under the Northampton Schools Review should remain as playing fields to help reduce the projected Borough-wide pitch deficit."

"Northampton Borough Council will only agree to the loss of pitches to development where the proposal includes GUARANTEED community access to other sites in the Borough, at convenient times and affordable rates."

Until legally binding contracts governing community access are drawn up between Northamptonshire County Council and its PFI partners, we cannot see how NBC could even consider supporting the disposal of playing fields and green open space.

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<sup>2</sup> NBC Playing Pitch Strategy

Our final complaint is that the report makes no comment whatever regarding a number of key borough matters, including but not limited to

- Access arrangements
- Car parking
- Nature conservation
- Listed buildings
- Conservation Area
- Protected species
- Ancient monuments and archaeological sites
- Scale of development
- Effect on trees
- Traffic generation
- Public right of Way
- Noise and disturbance
- Use in unsocial hours
- Human health
- Public transport
- Odours
- Height/mass or density of development
- Attraction of crowds
- Pollution potential
- Sustainability
- Employment potential
- Ground conditions
- Disruption during construction
- Surface water drainage or flooding problems

Although we appreciate that the final decision regarding the development of Parklands Middle School rests with the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation, it is the council's responsibility as a consultee to inform WNDC of all local issues that are felt to be relevant. The current report far from satisfies this requirement.

This is the second occasion on which the planning committee have been forced to withdraw the surplus school sites item during a planning meeting, leading to considerable unnecessary waste of time and money, not to mention effort and commitment of the part of committee members and registered speakers. Under the circumstance, it is difficult not to question the competence of the officers involved.

Based on the evidence laid out, if the officer's report is not amended prior to resubmission to the planning committee we intend to seek a judicial review of this application.

We await your response.

Yours sincerely

*Simon Hegarty*

Simon Hegarty  
Vice Chair Parklands Residents' Association  
For Parklands' residents