

COMPTONS TENNIS CLUB – proposed Padel courts

Supporting statement

Comptons Tennis Club was founded in 1964 by a group of Horsham residents with the aim of improving the availability of facilities to play tennis in the Horsham area. It has occupied its present freehold site in Lower Beeding for about 60 years and during that time has built a substantial club house and installed 7 tennis courts, all of which are floodlit.

Comptons Tennis Club is registered as a Community Amateur Sports Club which means that it is run on a not-for-profit basis for the benefit of the local community. It is open to all and every effort is made to attract and welcome new members. There are no tennis clubs in the surrounding villages including Cowfold, Mannings Heath and Nuthurst.

Subscriptions are kept as low as reasonably possible in order to make the Club as accessible as possible. For example, the annual subscription for a child under 10 is only £36 and the annual subscription for an adult is the equivalent of £5 per week, and payment by instalments is offered. The subscription provides unlimited court use without any further payment.

Padel tennis which has similarities to tennis is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. It is popular because it is much easier to learn than tennis and all ages can play together competitively. It is played on a court which is around half the size of a traditional tennis court. The court has partly glass walls which the ball can bounce off and remain in play.

These features mean that it appeals to a broad age range. The smaller size of the court can make it more attractive to older and less active players. For younger players, it is easier to take up as the ball does not need to be hit so hard. It also seems to be attracting an audience of young adults who participate in a wide range of ball sports and who enjoy the social aspects of the game.

Comptons would like to enhance its offering by providing Padel in addition to tennis to meet the needs of a wider market, particularly younger players. There are several new housing developments underway or planned within the catchment area of Comptons and the club believes that enhancing its facilities with two Padel courts will appeal to young families and other occupants of these developments. It will mean that they have less need to travel so far to access sports facilities.

Lower Beeding Parish Council is supportive of this proposal as is the Lawn Tennis Association, which is the National Governing Body for both tennis and Padel. The proposal also enjoys significant support from Comptons existing members.

Comptons has an area of lawn which is unused at present, and which is sufficiently large to allow the installation of two Padel courts. This would bring into use an unused area of land to the benefit of the local community.

The proposed site is adjacent to 3 tennis courts which have floodlighting using 10 metre columns and have a partly implemented planning consent to erect an inflatable dome some 9.5 metres high (DC/17/1613).

Padel courts are constructed by installing a concrete ring beam around the perimeter of the court. The walls of the court are prefabricated and can be sourced from any one of several suppliers and are bolted to the ring beam to form the court. A porous playing surface is laid within the ring beam.

The surrounding walls of the courts are 3m high except at either end where there is additional mesh screen which adds a metre to the height. The total height of 4m is similar to the roofline of the adjacent clubhouse.

The Padel courts would also be floodlit, but the columns used at 6m would be less high than the 10m columns on the adjacent lawn tennis courts as the Padel courts have a smaller area to be illuminated. To the west of the site there are trees which are substantially higher than the proposed courts.

Comptons has a substantial car park which provides more space than is needed by the users of the existing courts, so the provision of two further courts in addition to the existing 7 courts should not cause any problems with parking. There have not been any traffic issues arising from access to the club's site. Nevertheless, the recent introduction of a 40mph limit on Leechpond Hill is welcome and further improves the safety of those accessing the site.

The club's existing facilities provide disabled access including a wheelchair ramp for the clubhouse. The toilets are also accessible to disabled users. It is the intention to provide a path of sufficient width along the south side of the proposed courts with a suitably graded path to allow wheelchair access to the new courts.

There is only one house near to the club as its neighbour to the north is pasture and to the south is a playing field. The house to the west is some distance from the nearest part of the Padel courts and is screened by substantial hedges and trees.

The noise on a Padel court is not dissimilar to that of on a tennis court. The ball is very similar to a tennis ball but has a lower pressure. The Padel rackets are solid but perforated so the speed of the ball is lower than in tennis. The one area where the noise from Padel differs to tennis is the impact of the ball on the glass surrounding walls, which increases the sound generated during play, although it is mostly reflected back into the court. Comptons has not received any complaints from the occupiers of the nearby house about the noise from the existing tennis courts. The proposed Padel courts will be further away from the house and well screened by substantial hedges and trees so, although Padel may be a little noisier than lawn tennis, noise should not be a problem. Comptons has obtained an Acoustic Impact Assessment from a professional noise impact consultant. This report concludes that the noise impact of the proposed Padel courts would be acceptable.

The floodlights on the existing tennis courts are much closer to the nearby house than those required for the proposed Padel courts. Furthermore, the lights on the tennis courts are on 10m high columns and have never given rise to any concerns about light spillage. The lights on the Padel courts will be further away and on 6m columns so light spillage should not be an

issue. A report from the proposed lighting supplier shows that the scheme would have a minimal effect on the adjacent residential property.

The existing floodlights which are much taller than those proposed for the Padel courts and are much nearer to the adjacent house are subject to a condition that they should not be used outside the hours of 8am to 9pm Sunday to Thursday and 8am to 10pm Friday and Saturday. This was established when the permission for the dome was granted. If a similar condition is imposed in relation to the Padel courts it would be accepted by Comptons,

The area to be developed has an overall footprint of 44m x 11m. i.e. just under 0.05 Hectare and comprises an area of mown grass. As this is not a priority habitat and the development is less than 0.2 Hectare, the development is exempt from the requirement to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain.

Horsham District Council Local plan includes in Policy 43 an intention to support improving the provision of sporting facilities. In addition, the Horsham District Council Sport, Open Space and Recreation Assessment of February 2024 recognises the need to promote good health and well-being by, inter alia, the provision of affordable sports and recreation facilities. It adds that the Council should also support the development of new courts wherever possible.

This proposal to install two Padel courts to complement the existing tennis courts responds well to the policies of Horsham District Council and Comptons hopes that it will therefore be acceptable for planning purposes.

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