

Introduction

This Statement of Consultation accompanies an application for Full Planning Permission, submitted to Manchester City Council ('MCC') by Rugby Football League ('the Applicant'), for the proposed Our League Life site.

Site Location

The Application Site ("the Site") is located within Beswick, East Manchester in a strategically important location within the wider Etihad Campus area. The Site is located off Kirkstead Close, to the north of Bell Crescent. The Site is situated within the Ancoats and Beswick Ward.

The East Manchester Academy and associated sports fields are located immediately to the north and north-west of the Site. To the south-west of the existing sports pitch a line of trees forms a boundary between the Site and the rear gardens of the two-storey residential properties along Metcombe Way. Bell Crescent borders the Site from the south to the east.

A surface car park is located to the north-east of the Site and comprises of circa 170 car parking spaces.

The wider area is characterised by a mixture of residential properties and much larger buildings used for sports, leisure, and education.

The East Manchester Leisure Centre is located to the junction of Bell Crescent and Grey Mare Lane to the east of the Site, whilst the Manchester City Football Club Training Ground is located to the east of Alan Turing Way, circa 300m from the Site.

The Etihad Stadium is also located circa 600m to the north of the Site. The Co-op Live Arena is also currently under construction to the north of the Etihad Stadium and is scheduled to open late 2023.

Site Description

The Site currently comprises an existing sports pitch and the single storey Beswick Local Shops, which have been vacant for several years. The Site also comprises surface car parking spaces for 28 vehicles.

It is currently accessed from Kirkstead Close which connects to Bell Crescent, onto Grey Mare Lane and then onto Alan Turing Way; a major arterial route through East Manchester.

The sports pitch currently comprises rugby posts and a tall metal structure providing netting behind. A transparent metal fence lines the boundary to Bell Crescent to the south and East of the Site.

Proposed Development

The Proposed Development comprises the development of the Our League Life National Community Hub (hereafter referred to as the 'OLL Hub'). The OLL Hub provides an opportunity for the RFL to utilise its strengths in northern communities and act as a vehicle for social mobility. The OLL Hub will celebrate, expand, and roll out existing good practice in Rugby League communities across the north of England, adding value, and providing coordination. It provides a place for training in all aspects of the game from groundsmen, media through to sports science. It will also be used by the national teams on occasions for training purposes.

The proposals for the OLL Hub include the demolition of the existing building on-site and the erection of a training facility building (Use Class F1(a)) and ancillary uses comprising classrooms, seminar rooms, ancillary offices, flexible conferencing space and workspace and an ancillary café / kitchen. It also includes ancillary changing facilities and a 900-seat spectator stand, together with an upgrading of the existing rugby pitch, the erection of floodlighting, and related access and highways works.

2. Policy Context

Guidance and policy requirements regarding consultation and pre-application engagement is set out at both the national and local level in this section.

National

Localism Act

The Localism Bill was introduced to Parliament on 13 December 2010, and was given Royal Assent on 15 November 2011, becoming an Act (“the Act”).

The main aim of the Act is to shift power from Central Government back into the hands of individuals, communities, and Councils. It includes five key measures as follows:

- Community rights.
- Neighbourhood planning.
- Housing.
- General power of competence.
- Empowering cities and other local areas.

Part 6 of the Act specifically deals with planning and Chapter 4 sets out requirements in relation to consultation before applying for Planning Permission.

Section 122 of the Act amends the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to include a new section 61W that sets out a requirement to carry out pre-application consultation as follows:

(1) Where—

- (a) a person proposes to make an application for planning permission for the development of any land in England, and*
- (b) the proposed development is of a description specified in a development order, the person must carry out consultation on the proposed application in accordance with subsections (2) and (3).*

Subsections (2) and (3) state:

- (2) The person must publicise the proposed application in such manner as the person reasonably considers is likely to bring the proposed application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.*
- (3) The person must consult each specified person about the proposed application.*

Subsection (4) outlines the requirements in regards to publicity of applications:

(4) Publicity under subsection (2) must—

- (a) set out how the person ("P") may be contacted by persons wishing to comment on, or collaborate with P on the design of, the proposed development, and*
- (b) give such information about the proposed timetable for the consultation as is sufficient to ensure that persons wishing to comment on the proposed development may do so in good time.*

The Act also sets out a duty to take account of the responses to consultation. Section 61X requires a developer to have regard to any comments or responses generated by the consultation undertaken in accordance with section 61W, when deciding whether to make any changes to proposals before submitting a planning application.

Section 61Y enables the Secretary of State to set out further provisions as to how the consultation required under new section 61W should be undertaken in practice.

[National Planning Policy Framework \(2019\)](#)

The Department for Communities and Local Government published the amended NPPF in July 2021. The document sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are to be applied. It requires planning policies to meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change.

Paragraph 133 sets out that early engagement for assessing and improving the design of a development, are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes. Particularly within large scale housing and mixed-use developments, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.

Paragraphs 39-46 relate to pre-application engagement. Paragraph 39 states that local planning authorities should encourage applicants to engage with the local community before submitting their applications where they think this would be beneficial.

The NPPF also promotes the use of the Local Planning Authority Pre-Application Service to encourage a partnership approach to applications. It is considered that early engagement with the local planning authority is often conducive to the best result for the application, as it highlights where further work is required.

[National Planning Practice Guidance](#)

The PPG is an online resource designed to bring together planning practice guidance for England in an accessible and useable way. The PPG provides further detail to assist in the understanding of planning policies set out within the NPPF, including requirements for pre-application engagement.

Paragraphs 013 of the 'Consultation and pre-decision matters' section identify that:

- In line with the policies of the NPPF, statutory consultees have an important role to play in the pre-application stage and should be engaged early.

Paragraph 09 of the 'Design: process and tools' section sets out that pre-application discussions are an opportunity to discuss the design policies and requirements that will be applied to a site.

In terms of Design, the PPG sets out in Paragraphs 001 - 008 and 016 - 018 of the methods for assessing and improving the design quality to promote good design and to achieve well-designed places at all stages of the planning process, including design review.

Paragraphs 019 - 023 of the 'Design: process and tools' section outlines tools for effectively engaging with local communities, including community panel or forums, exhibitions and digital methods.

The local authority can explain the design issues they feel are most important and the developer can explain their own objectives and aspirations.

Being able to inform and influence the design of a Proposed Development early in the design process is more efficient than trying to implement suggested revisions at a later stage – particularly if this relates to a major proposal.

Local

Manchester City Council Statement of Community Involvement

MCC adopted a refreshed Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in June 2018. The SCI sets out how and when MCC will involve the community in relation to the preparation and revision of the Local Development Documents and in the process of making decisions on planning applications.

Appendix 1 of the SCI provides guidance on developer-led early engagement.

The SCI states that early engagement has significant benefits by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system for all parties. Therefore, developers are encouraged to consult before submitting a planning application.

The SCI encourages developers to consult with the public and various parties, which could include equalities groups, as well as with specific infrastructure and service providers who can advise developers on any need for increased provision of services.

Consultations should be inclusive, transparent, clear, and understandable. Additionally, developers are encouraged to submit a record of the consultation that took place with their planning submission, which is detailed within Section 3 of this Statement.

Summary

This section has set out the relevant elements of Planning Policy that relate to the formulation of development proposals during the pre-application stage.

The following section of this report sets out, in detail, the extensive amount of pre-application and engagement that has taken place with the local community, statutory and non-statutory consultees in line with the guidance and requirements set out above.

3. Consultation Strategy and Responses

This section describes the consultation that has been undertaken by the Applicant and the project team. It includes an outline of the consultation strategy and the outcome of the consultation process.

Whilst it has not been possible to undertake all face to face engagement sessions due to the impact of COVID-19, it has been possible to engage all parties throughout using online platforms and different types of media, including leaflets, email exchange and conferencing calls. A public consultation exhibition was then held in October.

Proposed Development Consultation Strategy

Pre-application consultation has been focused upon providing an explanation of the Proposed Development, including the way in which the detailed design of the proposals has responded to the Site's economic, planning and regeneration context.

This process has sought to address specific site considerations, questions and comments that have been raised during the consultation process. Further to the consultation, in line with MCC's Statement of Community Involvement and as agreed with the Local Planning Authority, the following application specific consultation has taken place to date:

- Dialogue with Senior City Council Planning Officers, which has taken place throughout the design development process in order to ensure their support in principle;
- Online public engagement presentations of the proposals through a website that was live during design development to help inform the local public and seek their views, which have been responded to, as set out in this Statement;
- Local Ward Councillors (Ancoats & Beswick) were consulted on the proposed scheme in October 2021 to provide information on the proposed development and seek their views which were discussed during the briefing sessions and are responded to in this Statement;
- Various meetings with technical statutory, including MCC Highways to present the proposals and gather feedback;

Regarding consultation and engagement with members of the public and a range of stakeholders, it is considered that a wide range of views have been received and considered in detail as part of formulating the proposals. In addition to online content, a face to face meeting took place which provided an opportunity to talk to local residents and stakeholders through the proposals and gather valuable feedback.

The sections set out in subheadings below further describe the consultation activity undertaken in preparation of this Application, provide a summary of the feedback received and how this has been addressed within the Proposed Development.

Pre-Application Consultation

Manchester City Council (MCC)

Regular dialogue has taken place with the MCC as the LPA during the process of preparing this application, including consultation with MCC as the Local Planning Authority; MCC Highways and Neil Fairlamb - Head of Parks, Leisure, Events and Youth.

Meetings in March 2021 & again in October 2021 have taken place via Microsoft Teams with various MCC representatives to present the proposals and discuss key considerations of the Proposed Development:

- The Proposed Development
- Scope of the planning application;
- Important amenity considerations including noise and light spillage.

Those MCC Officers in attendance include:

- Dave Roscoe – Head of City Centre Development
- Jennifer Atkinson – Case Officer

These MCC Officers were supportive of the project and the positive impacts for the local community. They expressed the need to ensure that the local community are made aware of the benefits of the scheme, including training and pathways to employment, through the consultation process and within the

planning submission. Alongside this the Officers expressed the importance of accurately identifying the impacts of the scheme and the measures that will need to be taken to mitigate against those impacts. Those key items which the MCC Officers highlighted as important to address are as follows:

- Details of how frequently the grass pitch will be used, notably with floodlighting, and the hours of operation in general;
- Details of the number of people occupying the Site along with the frequency and scale of any larger event; and
- Transport considerations and impact.

Following the submission of this application relating to the Proposed Development, the Applicant and the agent will continue to pro-actively resolve any comments made during the statutory determination period and prior to a decision being made.

Highways Department

The Transport Consultant for the project (Curtins) met with MCC Highways on the 15th September 2021 to discuss the project and agree a strategy to cover the necessary requirements for the application within the Transport Statement submitted with the application.

It was agreed at that meeting and in following correspondence that a Transport Assessment and Travel Plan would be required. This should include the following:

- An audit of accessibility by all modes of travel including walking, cycling, and public transport;
- A review of highway safety within the vicinity of the Site for the most recent five years;
- Drawings of any changes to the adopted highway network, if proposed (none proposed);
- Swept path analysis drawings to demonstrate the proposed servicing arrangements;
- Details of proposed car and cycle parking arrangements and justification for the provision;
- Details of vehicular trips and commentary on any highway impacts;
- Junction modelling of the Grey Mare Lane/Alan Turing Way junction;
- Consideration of pedestrian crossing improvements at the Grey Mare Lane/Alan Turing Way junction;
- Confirmation that the OLL Hub will be cognisant of the proposed Arena Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) that is due to be implemented in 2023; and

- A review of the relevant local and national transport planning policy.

MCC Highways and TfGM agreed that a first principles approach to anticipated trip generation can be applied using a combination of TRICS data and usage assumptions.

Further discussions will take place with MCC Highways following the submission of the planning application.

The RFL will also continue to work with MCC Highways regarding the upcoming Controlled Parking Zone proposals that are being developed in advance of the Arena opening. Once implemented, it is expected that the RFL will have the right to park in circa 50 spaces in the MCC Car Park.

Local Ward Councillors

A consultation exercise was undertaken with Local Councillors, including Ward Councillors for Ancoats & Beswick. These virtual meetings have taken place in order to provide information on the Proposed Development, gather feedback and encourage dissemination of information into the local community.

An initial virtual meeting with Ward Councillors took place on 13 October 2021 via Teams to discuss the demand for the development, the principle of development and seek views on the Proposed Development. The meeting was attended by Councillor Majid Dar. Further meetings were scheduled with Councillor Rosa Battle; however, Councillor Battle could not attend. Councillor Hutchinson was also contacted however due to long term absence was unavailable.

The key discussion points and queries raised are summarised below.

- a Potential for usage of site for local community events, with room available to hire.
- b Discussed the potential for traffic issues, discussed limited impact this would cause.

There was general support for Our League Life site with Councillors keen to engage with the project as it continues to develop. Councillors also highlighted the potential for Our League Life site to work with existing local community groups and organisations as a key opportunity for the scheme.

Local Community

Public consultation was primarily conducted via a microsite followed by a face to face briefing meetings on 21st October 2021 at Beswick Library between the hours of 3pm to 7pm.

Response rates from the public have been average for the scheme with 800 invites sent and 27 people attending the public consultation. Responses received provided helpful and constructive feedback to inform the design process.

Thoughts and ideas have been suggested in terms of future opportunities, community engagement, design, and site management, which have been incorporated into the Proposed Development submitted in this Application where possible. Further information on the consultation with the local community is set out below.

Consultation Leaflet Invite

On 15th October 2021, approximately 800 consultation leaflets were distributed to local residents and businesses via first class royal mail, to notify them of the consultation website launch and public consultation event.

The consultation leaflet (see Appendix A) provided a high-level introduction to the proposals, details of the public consultation event dates. The leaflet also provided details of the microsite and how to provide feedback and comments on the proposals.



OUR LEAGUE LIFE

JOIN US

21 OCTOBER 2021
3PM - 8PM

INVITE

For a drop-in session to hear about a proposed exciting new development by the Rugby Football League to bring a skills, education and training facility to East Manchester in 2023 on the site of the former Beswick Local Shopping Centre



VENUE

Beswick Library,
The East Manchester Academy,
60 Grey Mare Lane, Beswick



Media and Social Media Coverage and Awareness Raising

As part of the consultation strategy, the Applicant took a proactive approach with local and regional media outlets to encourage participation in the consultation and inform a wide audience of the Proposed Development.

A press release was issued in October 2021 to provide an overview of the proposals and information on how residents, stakeholders and interested third parties could participate in the consultation and engage with the project team.

Consultation Website & Public Consultation

The consultation website launched on 12 October 2021.

The material presented online introduced the vision, concept for Our League Life, as well as providing details on the proposed design and operations, site location and context, and access.

A feedback form was available via the website for people to provide comments on the Proposed Development and an e-mail address was provided for people to send in comments. In total 7 responses and comments were received on the Proposed Development. All these responses were left via the 27 people that attended the public consultation event.

Responses Received

Do you think this development will be good for the local community and Beswick area?	What do you like about the proposals?	What do you think could be improved?	Is there anything that worries you about the development?
Yes, a dramatic improvement on what is there currently.	Fantastic for children in local schools.	Building local shops and cafes nearby.	That it may not go ahead, and we will continue with wasteland and derelict buildings.
	I like how it can be used as a community space and how it will link to the colleges and existing community.		
Yes, a lot of development in the area already, good to see more investors.	Using the land that needs developing.	As long as it enables young people to join and get them off the street.	Rugby games on the same time as city football matches.
Yes I do.	Putting an old building – demolishing it in place of something productive. Plans look amazing.	More areas of Beswick.	Possibly the local area could be over saturated with traffic
100% no doubt	Community based.	Would be good for youths to get involved.	None

Summary & Conclusions

Overall, there is a recognition that the Proposed Development will:

Support and complement existing sites in the Beswick area, and the wider Greater Manchester area providing education and skills training.

Enhance a vacant, underutilised Site which has previously been subject to anti-social behaviour.

Make a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness, removing the current unutilised area of derelict land.

Written responses received as part of the public consultation process were largely positive with both supportive comments.

The Applicant is also committed to ensuring the consultation process will continue as part of the formal statutory planning procedure managed by the Local Planning Authority and beyond. During this process, the Applicant and the project team will continue to listen and engage with local stakeholders and, wherever possible, accommodate their ideas and aspirations.