

Eastcote Hockey Club – Written evidence (NPS0108)

House of Lords Committee on seeking views on Grass Roots sport

We at Eastcote Hockey Club, in the London Borough of Hillingdon, have been striving to build a second AstroTurf multi-sport pitch for more than ten years. Our existing pitch is fully utilised all day until 18:00 at weekends, and until 21:30 during the week. There is significant demand in the local area and we are at capacity. Despite this, London Borough of Hillingdon have consistently blocked our attempts to provide sporting provision in the area.

We run thirteen male and female adult teams on a Saturday, and provide coaching and matches for all junior age groups each Sunday. At present, we have 250+ juniors plus waiting lists for all ages. We would like to be able accommodate all players into some form of physical activity but unfortunately, without a second pitch, we will continue to turn these new, young players away.

In terms of grassroots provision, EHC Juniors is a great example of providing this through a volunteer workforce. Starting from the age of 6 through to u16s, there is a pathway to participate and excel. The makeup of the junior section enables strong coaching to be given within a well-organized structure. This in turn produces an atmosphere of confidence and stability and a springboard to move into adult hockey.

Eastcote Hockey Club is a place for all, it is very inclusive. We have a diverse membership as well as male and female players from 6 to 86.

We are a "Not for Profit" organisation (CASC) and have a business model that provides for replacing the playing surface, every ten years, and the base every thirty years. In addition we run a Clubhouse which is a social focal point for all, fully funded and maintained by the Club.

We also provide grass pitches for one of the largest Youth Football Clubs in the county.

In 2010, after a long and tortuous Planning Consent negotiation with our local authority, we were finally informed that our project would be passed, only to be informed on the eve of the hearing, that approval would be blocked by Cabinet. Plus if we appealed and won, we were told we would not be granted landlord's permission to build a second pitch.

There are two reasons why our project is blocked by the Local Authority.

The first is that hockey is seen by the Council to be a minority "Elitist Sport".

This is patently untrue. Hockey is welcoming to all and played by a diverse range of people. Plus we know there is significant demand in the area, evidenced by our long waiting lists.

What is true is that there is little to no hockey played in the schools in our Borough, but they would if they could, as we find when we talk to them. Local schools are channeling their interested students to us even though we cannot accommodate them.

The second is that this particular Council has introduced a Borough-wide "no floodlights" policy.

It is common sense that the use of a facility that can provide exercise and sport to the community should not be confined to daylight hours, particularly in this health-aware society we live in.

However, despite having a blanket ban on floodlights, a local school has recently obtained permission for them.

The lack of appetite to discuss the possibilities of a second pitch by the borough has a significant detrimental impact on the area and remains difficult to comprehend, given that the club and in particular the junior provision, meet the strategic aims and objectives of Hillingdon Borough Council.

The benefits of physical activity for all age groups on physical and mental health are well documented.

The lack of support from the local authority is very difficult to understand and even harder to accept when we are aligned on wanting to provide good quality sports provision for our local community.

What we are asking for is a **positive** dialogue, away from the old prejudices. After the refusal of Planning Consent, we identified a number of sites to which we would relocate, but this fell on deaf ears. **And here we are, ten years on, and still turning people away.**

Chris Clarke
President
Eastcote Hockey Club

29 January 2021