

CLIFFE AND CLIFFE WOODS RESIDENTS DEVELOPMENT GROUP

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Constituted 29 March 2022 | Rule 6(6) party to appeal APP/A2280/W/22/3313673 | Nominating body for the APCM Recreation Ground asset of community value

Ms Hannah Gunner

Principal Planning Officer, Development Management

Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

By email: hannah.gunner@medway.gov.uk and planning.representations@medway.gov.uk, and via the planning portal

Copy: Mr Peter Hockney, Head of Development Management Planning Service

8 September 2026

Dear Ms Gunner

SUPPLEMENTARY OBJECTION

Application MC/26/1646, and please also place on the file for MC/26/1467

The high voltage overhead line crossing the proposed playing fields

This supplements the group's objection to MC/26/1646 and is to be read with it. It raises one further ground, which the group considers to be as serious as any already put.

The applicant's own evidence records a high voltage overhead electricity line crossing the site at the location of the proposed playing fields, and records that it is to be left in situ. The site plan submitted under condition 41 does not show that line, or the pole it runs from, or any easement, clearance or buffer associated with it, and says nothing about how its presence over a public sports ground is to be managed. On that footing alone the Council cannot lawfully approve the design and layout of the pitches.

1. The applicant's own evidence

The Utilities Assessment submitted with MC/22/0254 on 2 February 2022, and put before the Inspector at appeal as core document CD1-15, states at paragraph 4.1.1:

UKPN records show an existing high voltage (HV) overhead line crossing the north-west of the site at the location of the proposed playing fields, from pole 712400 at the rear of 'Rectory' on Church Street, running in a south-westerly direction to West Lane. Underground HV cables also run from pole 712400 in an easterly direction within the verge of St Helens Road, back to Chancery Road substation.

At paragraph 4.1.2, under the heading "Network Modifications and Constraints", it states:

UKPN believe that the existing infrastructure that crosses the site will be unaffected by the current proposed layout and can therefore be left in-situ. However, if diversions are required a budget cost of £40,000.00 has been provided for these works.

Two things follow from those two paragraphs read together. The line crosses the land on which the replacement playing fields are to be built. And the applicant's position is that it stays where it is.

2. Why the 2022 conclusion cannot simply be carried across

The view recorded at paragraph 4.1.2 is expressed in terms of "the current proposed layout" as it stood in early 2022. That was an illustrative layout supporting an outline application in which layout was a reserved matter. It is not the layout now before the Council.

The layout now proposed is drawing SFRC-CF-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0510_7226 Site Plan-S3-P06. Its own revision log records six revisions between 12 June and 14 July 2026, including "Pitches updated, layout amended" on 16 June, "layout update" on 23 June and "Pitches and tennis adjusted, access gates added" on 29 June. The pitches have moved. A statement made in 2022 that a particular layout would leave the line unaffected cannot be relied upon for a layout drawn four years later, and the applicant has not asked UKPN to confirm that it still holds.

3. What the submitted drawing does not show

The group has examined the drawing submitted under condition 41. It contains no reference of any kind to the overhead line. There is no line, no pole 712400, no conductor, no easement or wayleave, no buffer or exclusion zone, no clearance dimension, no reference to UKPN, and no note as to diversion or retention. The words "overhead", "HV", "pole", "cable", "electricity", "easement" and "wayleave" appear nowhere on it.

The Council is therefore being asked to approve, as the design and layout of the pitches, a drawing which is silent about a live high voltage overhead line running across them.

4. Why this engages conditions 39 and 41 directly

Condition 41 requires details of the design and layout of pitches, courts, pavilion "and all other facilities where further approval of detail is needed". A high voltage overhead line crossing the field of play is a design and layout constraint of the first order. It dictates where pitches can be marked out, where equipment can be sited, where floodlighting could ever go, what plant can be used for maintenance, and what activities can safely take place beneath it.

Condition 39 requires the pitches, courts and pavilion to be constructed substantially in accordance with Sport England and FA, ECB and LTA technical design guidance. The Council cannot conclude that the layout accords with that guidance while the position of the overhead line relative to the pitches is unknown to it.

5. Unsupervised public use is the critical distinction

National Grid's "Design guidelines for development near pylons and high voltage overhead power lines", published in 2003 and reviewed and updated in 2019, addresses this situation directly. It accepts that pitches can in principle sit beneath overhead lines where the lines are high enough, but it draws a clear distinction based on who uses the land and how:

a sports pitch crossed by an overhead line on land belonging to a sole use club, which can only be accessed by its members is unlikely to raise concerns

and it advises that:

As a general rule, where it is intended to create open space areas near to overhead lines which are unsupervised/open access areas, a buffer zone where access is restricted should extend 15m either side of the outer conductors of the overhead line route so that inappropriate activities are discouraged.

It also states that "it is preferable to site sports pitches alongside the overhead lines, or using the overhead line as the outfield to minimise disturbance to any activity", and identifies activities that are problematic around overhead lines.

This is not a members-only club. Condition 43 requires a community use agreement covering pitches, tennis courts, pavilion and ancillary facilities, with details of pricing policy, hours of use and access by the community and grassroots clubs. The ground is to be an openly accessible community facility, reached by a public track and by restricted byway RS87, and used at times without supervision. That is precisely the unsupervised, open access case for which the guidance advises a restricted buffer, and it is the opposite of the sole use club case the guidance treats as unproblematic.

The group puts the guidance forward as the recognised statement of the principle and does not overstate its direct application. National Grid's document addresses transmission lines, whereas the asset here is a UK Power Networks distribution line which the applicant has never characterised and which the group's own 2022 evidence identifies as 33kV. The operator's own requirements, the relevant Energy Networks Association engineering recommendations, and the Health and Safety Executive's guidance note GS6, "Avoidance of danger from overhead electric power lines", are the documents that govern. None of them is before the Council on this application.

6. The group raised this in 2022 and it has never been answered

This is not a point invented for this application. The group's Objection Addendum of 11 October 2022, submitted to the Head of Planning, contains a numbered section headed "Relocated Sports Facilities – Danger from Overhead High-Voltage Cables". It states:

The new relocated sports field location is wholly inappropriate and dangerous in its current form. Located at the Southern end of the relocated sports field is a 33kV overhead cable as highlighted in the below map extracts. This cable has not only been unmitigated against, but it has also not even been recognised as a significant danger. Given that a sports field of the type and location proposed by the developer is a place that is likely to have families playing sport and engaging in other leisure activities such as kite flying, the presence of 33,000v unsheathed cables crossing the area is untenable.

The group's Rule 6(6) request to the Planning Inspectorate made the same point, describing the proposed location as "directly beneath 33,000V overhead cables, which would be a major hazard for many sports and recreational activities, such a kite flying etc." Its briefing to ward councillors of 27 September 2022 recorded that there was "no mention in the Officers report and no mitigation proposals".

Four years later there is still no drawing showing the line and still no mitigation proposal.

7. How many lines, and where

There is an unresolved question of fact which the Council should require the applicant to answer. The Utilities Assessment places the line crossing "the north-west of the site at the location of the proposed playing fields", running from pole 712400 in a south-westerly direction to West Lane. The group's 2022 addendum places a 33kV overhead cable at the southern end of the relocated sports field. The Utilities Assessment also records "further HV overhead lines run through the east of the site following Thatchers Lane and Well Penn Road", and overhead HV lines running from the Cliffe High Street substation "turning north-west to connect to the HV line crossing the site from the north to West Street".

Whether that is one line described from two vantage points or more than one line crossing the ground cannot be resolved from the documents before the Council, because the submitted drawing shows none of them. The applicant should be required to plot every overhead line and pole affecting the sports ground phase, with its voltage, on a dimensioned drawing. Until that is done neither the Council nor Sport England can assess the layout.

The applicant has not stated the operating voltage anywhere. The group's own evidence, submitted in 2022 and never contradicted, identifies it as 33kV.

8. What the group asks the Council to do

1. Require the applicant to submit a drawing showing the overhead line, pole 712400, the outer conductors, the statutory and operational clearances, and any easement or wayleave, plotted against the proposed pitch layout.
2. Consult UK Power Networks and obtain its written position on the layout now proposed, rather than relying on a statement made about a different layout in 2022.
3. Require the applicant to state the operating voltage of the line, whether it is to be diverted or left in situ, and if left in situ, what buffer, fencing, signage or use restriction is proposed, and how that is consistent with the community use agreement required by condition 43.
4. Put the question expressly to Sport England as part of the consultation which condition 41 requires, since the siting of pitches beneath or adjacent to an overhead line goes directly to the technical design guidance which condition 39 incorporates.
5. Refuse the application unless and until those matters are resolved.

9. Additional suggested reason for refusal

To be read with the reasons already suggested in the group's objection.

The details submitted make no reference to the high voltage overhead electricity line which the applicant's own Utilities Assessment records as crossing the site at the location of the proposed playing fields, and which that Assessment states is to be left in situ. In the absence of any drawing showing the line, its conductors and clearances relative to the proposed pitch layout, of any current confirmation from the network operator, and of any proposals for the management of an openly accessible community sports ground crossed by such a line, the local planning authority is unable to conclude that the design and layout of the pitches is safe, deliverable, or in accordance with the technical design guidance required by condition 39.

10. A note on the record

The Council refused MC/22/0254 in October 2022 with this matter squarely before it, and the group pursued it as a Rule 6(6) party at the inquiry. Whatever view is taken of the outline permission, the design and layout of the pitches is being settled now, under condition 41, and it is being settled on a drawing which does not show the line.

The group would be grateful for written acknowledgement that this supplementary objection has been placed on the files for MC/26/1646 and MC/26/1467.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Leslie (Chair)

For and on behalf of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Residents Development Group
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Sources: Utilities Assessment Part 1, MC/22/0254, validated 2 February 2022, paragraphs 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, also before the Inspector as core document CD1-15; drawing SFRC-CF-ZZ-XX-DR-A-0510_7226 Site Plan-S3-P06; National Grid, Design guidelines for development near pylons and high voltage overhead power lines, 2003, reviewed 2019; Health and Safety Executive guidance note GS6.