

**Hartham Leisure Centre, Hertford SG14 1QR. Reference:3/19/1882/FUL
Response from the Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan Steering Group**

1. Hartham Leisure Centre is within the Bengeo Neighbourhood Area Plan (BNAP) boundary. The consultation on the BNAP Pre-Submission Draft (Regulation 14) closed on the 15 September 2019. The BNAP Steering Group expect to submit a Regulation 16 Draft to East Herts District Council in the near future. This response is based on the published policies in the Regulation 14 Draft Neighbourhood Plan and relevant policy extracts are included.

Community Facilities

2. Hartham Leisure Centre is one of the community facilities linked to BNAP policy HBC2: Enhanced Community Facilities. The proposed provision of better community and leisure facilities at Hartham Leisure Centre, including a refurbished swimming pool, is welcome. We note that the new café would be accessible from the Common and open to all, not just to Leisure Centre users. We welcome the inclusion of a WC with baby-changing facilities, just off the café area, as more WC facilities are needed on the Common.
3. The proposed outdoor café seating area, overlooking the Common, would be a welcome community facility. One of the views proposed for protection in the Neighbourhood Plan is the view north across to The Warren, taking in the view to the north east of the St. Leonard's Church bellcote. This is the view café users would see.
4. We note that the soft play area has replaced the earlier proposal for a 'clip and climb' wall. In the Neighbourhood Plan survey, (distributed to around 3,400 homes) residents supported better facilities for young people. An indoor climbing wall would be a popular facility and could be utilised by youth groups. We recognise that there may be space and height constraints but recommend that, if feasible, a climbing/bouldering wall is factored into the design of one of the multi-purpose studios.

BNAP Policy HBC2: Enhanced Community Facilities

II. Priority should also be given to improved facilities for young people.

BNAP Policy HBN1: Landscape Views

II. View 8: Hartham Common towards The Warren

Impact of the design on the surrounding landscape

5. We have concerns about the exterior design of the proposed extension. Although the glass atrium would offer views through to the Common, the proposed exterior cladding, shape and appearance of the double height extension seem more suited to an industrial site than to Hartham, with its thousand-year heritage and Green Belt setting. We understand that timber cladding and mitigation planting were considered but rejected.

6. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment states that the ‘*visual effect*’ of the proposed development on Viewpoint 1, south of the Leisure Centre, would be ‘*Substantial*’ with a ‘*Moderate/Substantial*’ effect from Viewpoint 12, west and north of the Centre, a ‘*Moderate*’ effect from Viewpoints 6, 7, 8 and 9, north of the Centre, and a ‘*Moderate*’ effect from Viewpoint 11, west of the Centre. No mitigation measures are proposed.
7. The BNAP Steering Group responded to the consultation on the 2018-23 Hartham Common Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) and the consultation on the Hartham younger children’s play area. Page 33 of the GAP says that the various components at Hartham’s entrance (including the Leisure Centre and play areas) ‘*do not work together to create a place with a clear purpose or identity*’ and that a major component of the (GAP) project will be to ‘*transform this area into an impressive entrance to Hartham Common, an entrance that is fitting for a major park in the heart of a historic town and that raises the park’s profile.*’ Concept proposals for the play area suggest a naturalistic scheme, in keeping with its surroundings. Our view is that the proposed Leisure Centre extension would also jar with its refurbished neighbour.
8. We recognise the inherent constraints in enlarging a building constructed in the 1960s and extended in the 1990s, however, we recommend that alternative exterior design options, more suited to the surrounding landscape, are re-considered before approving this planning application. We support the proposal to install photovoltaics on the new roof.

BNAP Policy HBC2: Enhanced Community Facilities

II. Proposals to improve or enhance community facilities will be supported when they improve the range, quality, suitability and accessibility of facilities for residents, and when the benefits of development outweigh any disadvantages.

BNAP Policy HBB1: Local Business Development

I. Design of business premises should respect local heritage and architecture. Re-development should enhance the quality and accessibility of existing commercial premises.

BNAP Policy HBH2: Design and Layout

I. Developments should aim to (b) incorporate high efficiency standards and renewable energy to achieve carbon neutrality and (d) enhance the character, heritage and architecture of the area.

Sustainable Travel and Parking

9. There is conflicting information in the Design and Access Statement on whether car parking capacity will increase or remain static. The Parking Review suggests the latter, with a greater volume of accessible spaces. The Neighbourhood Plan supports and promotes sustainable travel. Improved foot and cycle path connectivity to and from the Leisure Centre and sufficient, secure, covered cycle parking will encourage the switch away from car use.
10. In the draft Neighbourhood Plan, the Public Footpaths from Ware Park Road to Hertford Lock are recommended for improvement. If this is achieved through s106 contributions from other developments, it will encourage more people to walk and cycle from that part of Bengoe to the Leisure Centre. We welcome the proposed new link path, running east to west along the back of

the Leisure Centre. Any measures to facilitate sustainable travel will mitigate the negative impact of car use on local air quality.

11. We recommend that some of the cycle parking in the Leisure Centre car park is covered and that electric vehicle charging points are installed.

BNAP Policy HBT3: Encouraging More Cycling

I. Development proposals should contribute to the establishment, enhancement and improved connectivity of cycle routes into, out of, and through the Neighbourhood Plan Area. S106 contributions should contribute towards improvements to the Public Footpaths from Ware Park Road to Hertford Lock (Hertford 17,18,19,20 and 23) connecting with Sustrans off-road route 61.

BNAP Policy HBH3: Landscape Design

1(e) Provision of sufficient, secure, covered cycle parking is essential to encourage active travel.

BNAP Policy HBT5: Parking

II. Provision of electric car charging points in car parks and other developments will be supported.

BNAP Policy HBN5: Improving Air Quality

II. Proposals should support the creation, improvement and extension of foot and cycle path connectivity, particularly to key services such as train stations, local employment, health care, and retail and leisure facilities within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Nature Conservation

12. We note that the regrettable loss of nine mature trees (to allow for the construction of the extension and revisions to the car park) will impact on biodiversity on the site. The proposed compensatory tree planting, installation of bat boxes, and sowing of a traditional hay meadow wildflower mix around the perimeter of the horseshoe car park, are welcome. It's unclear what the volume of tree replacement will be. We recommend that it is greater than the number removed.

BNAP Policy HBN4: Nature Conservation

I. All development should conserve and enhance biodiversity and seek to deliver net biodiversity gains.

III Proposals to create new natural areas and wildlife habitats, or to expand or enhance existing provision, will be strongly encouraged.

III. Replacement of native trees, in suitable locations, will be encouraged.