

Public open space disposal - Land at Exwick Playing Fields

Comments received and our responses.

Comment No.	Comments	Council Response
1.	Astro Turf surface runs counter to Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy, 2022 We have objections to the construction of an astro turf pitch on this site. Astroturf kills off the life in the soil underneath it which deprives birds and animals of the food this area at present produces - thus causing the further demise rather than the restoration of nature. Astroturf inevitably degrades with use which could see disintegrated particles reaching the river and polluting it, to the detriment of already threatened aquatic species. The manufacture of astro-turf has a huge carbon footprint, and furthermore when its use comes to an end, it cannot be recycled. The Exeter Playing Pitch Strategy of 2022 says that playing pitches should be built "to manage and maintain these facilities in such a way as to address issues around environmental sustainability and the effect on climate." There are sustainable alternatives to plastic. There exist alternatives to these environmentally hazardous plastic-based pitches, for example cork. We would like to ask that a condition of the leasing of the land at Exwick Playing Field contains a clause to require non-plastic-based pitches and instead to use substances which are not harmful to wildlife, and which biodegrade such as cork. There are many options now for non-plastic based pitches such as can be seen here https://icsuro.com/en/suro-soccer-fields/ and here https://sportsvenuecalculator.com/knowledge/artificial-turf-field/artificial-turf-infill-material-options/	The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710. Consideration would also have been given to environmental impact, loss of open space and the fencing. of the 3G pitch. Provision of the 3G pitch accords with the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy which identifies within the strategy for rugby the provision of additional pitches, either grass and/or artificial grass, to meet training needs. Specifically, the Strategy also states that access to a floodlit carpet hybrid pitch or 3G FTP at Flowerpot may assist.

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	We think it is beholden upon Exeter City Council to include as a condition of the lease a requirement for such surfaces, in order that the lease complies with the Playing Pitch Strategy. Furthermore, we are concerned that the leaseholder may install a high fence to protect its asset. We believe this would be highly detrimental to the public realm, and amenity especially given its location within the Valley Park. We request that the City Council ensure that any future lease protects the site and maintains public access in line with the Council's Adopted Valley Park Masterplan	
2.	I strongly object to this expansion of colleges use of our public space I live in St David's, and I can hear them shouting to each other at this very moment. It is so loud I can hear the words. This is daytime so at nighttime it will be louder and more invasive to my life and others. If there are flood lit lights till 10pm and beyond it will be unbearable. The sound carries well across the valley especially when 2 teams of rugby players and spectators are shouting. Floodlights will also be light polluting to our skies. The extra land will create narrows corridors from one field to the next creating an unsafe space for men and women walking their dogs in an evening or early morning. Trees will go, the landscape will be ugly. There is no need for them to expand they have a rugby pitch and new changing rooms, so what else do they need. Exeter College just wants to expand and expand north thinking or caring who use this space EVERY DAY. It will only be used for a few people not the community. This is one of the few green open spaces left in the city do not take it away to give to Exeter College I can hear them now shouting and it's not good for one's quality of life to hear them throughout the day and now evening Also as the same from their previous plans there are no notices going up around all of the entrances to let people know about this.	Objections relating to impact on amenity, noise and loss of trees are considerations were taken into account by the Local Planning Authority when assessing the planning application. The land to be leased to the College remains available for use by the community as recreational space when not in use for matches. Similarly, the 3G pitch is to be made available for hire by the community when not in use by the College. These obligations are included with the proposed lease to the College.
3.	In regard to this consultation, I have no objection. However, can you please ensure that dogs are still permitted off the lead around the flowerpots plot if disposal is granted. This is an essential exercise area for dogs that local residents rely on.	The land to be leased to the College remains available for use by the community as recreational space when not in use for matches.

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	I'm sure the college will make good use of this site which will support sport and leisure in the city.	
4.	Firstly, I note that there will be an all-weather football pitch. Is this necessary? Artificial turf is extremely bad for the environment and wildlife. The council is supposed to be leading the way at carbon foot printing and reducing waste. The football fields at Barton Fields are used regularly throughout the winter and the grass recovers fine. I'm sure it won't hurt the students to get a little muddy. Secondly if floodlights are installed, this will be to the detriment of Bats that use the area. Thirdly although it is stated that the areas will remain accessible to the public, realistically I doubt that will be the case. If the college are using the land for student sporting activities, they will not want dog walkers and cyclists wandering over the pitches. I do not object in principle to leasing land to the college, but I would like the issues above to be addressed with special regards to the effect on wildlife and the environment.	The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710. Consideration would also have been given to the impact on bats from the artificial lighting. The land to be leased to the College remains available for use by the community as recreational space when not in use for matches. Similarly, the 3G pitch is to be made available for hire by community groups when not in use by the College. These obligations are included with the proposed lease to the College.
5.	As a local resident who lives on Exwick Road the college is causing real issues for local residents. Not being able to park or access to roads due to people using the sites the college already own. Parking on pavements on disabled parking. If there was a fire or an emergency in Simey Close emergency vehicles would not be able to gain access to area. People who use the site during the evening have no respect for local safety when they just abandon their vehicles wherever they see fit. Please take this in consideration when allowing them to have this. Can the cycle paths be better marked as when they are being used cyclist have no respect for pedestrians or dog walkers. Dog bins are located on the cycle side, so pedestrians have to cross them to their peril and not being hit or receiving a torrent of verbal abuse from cyclists.	Devon County Highways were consulted by the Local Planning Authority as part of the planning process. Highways response was taken into account when determining whether or not to grant planning permission. Marketing, for sale or let, of the Council's closed public toilets is underway. Disposal of these sites and their repurposing is anticipated to resolve ongoing anti-social behaviour associated with these voids.

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	On a plus side the guys who use the cricket pitch have kept it so well. What are the plans for the toilets as they are being used as a drug den or drug trading place. I have personally contacted the police regarding this as it being used for their use. We often see people totally of their heads on drugs or drink, and broken bottles or needles. Exwick is a lovely area but being let down by the few!!	
6.	I have some questions about the ongoing consultation, which I would like a clarification before responding please. The consultation page, and the Councils communications regarding the consultation state "The land will remain accessible to the public". The attached plan ref 1643 - PL02 Rev G describes the perimeter of the rugby pitch as extended from 2m to 5m. Will the land within the red line shown on this plan remain accessible to the public? If this area is to be fenced off as part of the transfer of ownership, what park space are the college to provide in return to offset this loss of public green space? Secondly, the attached plan describes all land as within the blue boundary as within the ownership of Exeter College ("the applicant") Is this correct? My understanding is that this is land owned by Exeter City Council. Thirdly, the councils published policy appears to be that public open space can only be disposed of in exceptional circumstances. It's unclear from the consultation material, or the press release, why the council consider this disposal exceptional. Please can you confirm what the Councils policy is with regard to disposal or public open space, and how this disposal is compliant with that. I note the current Labour administration have campaigned over a number of recent elections of protecting green space, so it does seem at odds.	The 3G pitch will be fenced as per the 3G football pitch at Ennerdale Road but is to be available to the community to hire when the College are not using the pitches for teaching. The Policy for the Disposal of Public Open Space is a document produced by the Council's Commercial Estates department to manage applications for disposals of small parcels of land, these applications are for land typically within housing estates and relate to creating parking spaces, extending gardens or removing land that creates anti-social behaviour. This policy does not cover disposal of playing fields. In this scenario the Council is obliged to advertise the disposal in accordance with s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972. Under the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is required to advertise the intention to dispose of the land in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks and then consider any objections to the disposal which may be made. This has been undertaken. The land in question already forms part of an area leased to Exeter College, the disposal is a surrender of part and regrant to extend the term of those parts of

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		the existing College lease area formed by the pavilion and 3G pitch. The proposed disposal does not include any land outside of the existing lease to the College. Should the Council decide to not proceed with this disposal (surrender and regrant to extend the term of part of the existing demise) to the College, the College would still be able to proceed with the works under the terms of the existing lease.
7.	I've just seen the plans to change the use of this area. I think the council should be protecting any areas of natural landscape around Exeter and keep it for the wildlife and trees which are so important in these days where every spare bit of land is taken for the use of us humans.	The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including ecology and landscape.
8.	I was under the impression that this land has been granted planning permission and that the project will go ahead. I believe many people are unaware of the eyesore the pitch part of the plan will be. Also, a plastic pitch is NOT environmentally friendly, however you frame it! When the pitch next to the Sport's Hub had just been built, I had to run and hold my breath to pass it. The terrible smell made me feel sick. The smell eventually passed. I don't know if others were affected, but I certainly was. The content of these pitches is really environmentally frightening. If this plan goes ahead, as I fear it will, I will be buying myself a good gas mask.	The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710
9.	I strongly object to Exeter college encroaching more public space from people of Exeter and the use of bright floodlights on their Rugby pitch. If they extend more, it will make public route from one field to another very narrow and destroying Exeter citizens right of a large green space.	The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including light pollution and public access to open space. One of the big aims of the project is to ensure access and enhance facilities available to not only Exeter

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		College, but also young people, local groups and clubs from across the city and region, helping to increase participation in physical activity, improve wellbeing etc.
10.	I am writing out of grave concern at the proposed plan for an all-weather pitch at Flowerpot Fields which would involve the laying of astro-turf over this area. You may well be aware of many written objections already made on account of the severe damage this would cause to the ecology both of the site itself and more widely. I should like to renew my objection (since my letter wasn't acknowledged.) Astroturf kills off the life in the soil underneath it; in turn this deprives birds and animals of the food this area at present produces - thus causing the further demise rather than the restoration of nature. Astroturf inevitably degrades with use which could see disintegrated particles reaching the river and polluting it, to the detriment of already threatened aquatic species. The manufacture of astro-turf has a huge carbon footprint, and furthermore when its use comes to an end it cannot be recycled. Do you not realise that we are facing a desperately severe ecological crisis, and the preservation and restoration of nature should absolutely take priority over non-essential human gratification? If you are allowing this because the council is seriously short of money, I know that many of us who are reasonably well off would be willing to pay more council tax (or local income tax.)	The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710 The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including ecology and sustainability Money is not the driver. The College already has a lease of the land. This is simply a surrender of part of the current lease and the regrant of a new lease in connection with the further development of the enhanced facilities.
11.	I am writing to express my strong disapproval to Exeter City Council leasing land which is intended for the use of all Exeter residents. The playing fields are already used by sports groups, but free access to all areas is still available for local people. The playing field provides a safe recreational space for all, especially the elderly, the young, dog walkers and those who should have access to an area of calming green space in an urban environment.	One of the big aims of the project is to ensure access and enhance facilities available to not only Exeter College, but also young people, local groups and clubs from all across the city and region, helping to increase participation in physical activity, improve wellbeing etc.

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	I walked in the playing fields every day when off from work in the NHS with work induced stress and anxiety - an international sized, astro turfed and floodlit rugby ground will destroy the essential green space for people like myself with ongoing mental health issues. I have listed my issues regarding this issue below: • The ecological impact and damage caused by an astroturf surface on local wildlife and flood prevention • The noise and light pollution caused by rugby practice and games into the evening (I walk every day in the playing fields and the shouting and general noise when practice and games are happening is very intrusive) • Increased traffic in Western Road is already an issue. Cars are regularly driven over 30mph in a 20mph zone. • The potential for increased traffic in Okehampton Road. • The constant chipping away of land intended for use by everyone -soon there will be very little available within walking distance. If the council decides to go ahead with the planned lease despite the wishes of local people and the disastrous environmental impact; can they ensure that the new college building includes public toilets? I see people of all ages every day coming out of the bushes after having to relieve themselves outdoors. Does the College really require an Astroturf pitch when there are two pitches side by side? Surely they can rotate their use to prevent excess damage to the pitches. The impact of the lease to Exeter College which will benefit a few fit young men and women (even if the College rents the pitches to those of all ages, it is still a minority) at the expense of a great many local people who deserve to be treated with kindness and respect by their City Council. I sincerely hope that the Council will reconsider this lease and ask that the College find private grounds to lease which will not affect those who are more vulnerable and truly need a green space for their emotional and physical wellbeing.	The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including ecology, noise and traffic. Devon County Highways were consulted by the Local Planning Authority as part of the planning process. Highways response was taken into account when determining whether or not to grant planning permission.
12.	I wish to object to the lease of land to Exeter College for the provision of an all-weather pitch. My reasons are as follows: • Rugby training has continued for many years without an all-weather facility.	The old pitch was unplayable for large parts of the season which not only affects formal competition, but it also means the classroom is unavailable for the

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	• The rugby players I have spoken to do not like playing in this surface. • Unless Exeter College is using something different, current astro turf cannot be recycled. • The installation will destroy wildlife habitat and plants that have been managed and nurtured. I hope the council will reconsider this proposal and not allow it to proceed.	Sports and PE Faculty (the rugby pitch is timetabled as three classrooms during normal teaching days). The players, coaches, teaching staff, students and local clubs have all welcomed this development and think it is an amazing facility. The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including ecology The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710
13.	I read about the plans to lease a large section of land on the playing fields at Exwick. I am writing to oppose the leasing of such a large area for a floodlit rugby pitch as this proposal would significantly change the appearance and experience of the playing fields as they currently are. Would this impact upon the current use of the cricket pitch? I am also concerned about the environmental impact as the fields at the moment are in an area alongside the allotments and having a large pitch with floodlights and the additional increase in traffic and activity could impact upon the wildlife. Would the rugby pitch be real grass or artificial grass? I believe there is artificial grass in the one that was built alongside the College sports pavilion, and this is not good for the environment, nor for the health of people playing on the pitch or maintaining it. If the council is committed to recognising the climate emergency, there needs to be genuine commitment to reducing impact on wildlife and the environment.	The land is already leased to Exeter College, this is a surrender of part and regrant of a lease on the same land The planning process had to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including ecology, lighting and traffic Exwick Cricket Club are a key community partner, sit on the Exwick Hub Advisory Steering Group and have supported the project. The 3G pitch does not impact on the cricket pitch
14.	FLOW CIC Directors have very recently been made aware of a consultation, published on 16th August 2024, to lease two parcels of land within the Riverside Valley Park where Exeter College is planning to develop new changing rooms and classrooms as well as an	Under the conditions to planning consent 21/1710 the College are obliged to provide a tree protection plan

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	all-weather rugby pitch. We have yet to discover exactly what difference leasing the land will make. The FLOW project has trees planted all through the Valley Park and we have made a site visit to check on whether any of these trees might be affected by the proposed developments. Please refer to our website www.floworchardexeter.uk for the various maps I refer to. We see that: - 1. one of our trees (No 88 on Map 14) is directly in line with the managed access point of the temporary trackway route marked in purple on the Draft map 14.09.2023. 2. Trees Nos 41-45 (on Map 11) are close to the proposed new boundary of the all-weather pitch. 3. Trees Nos 57-61 (on Map10) fall <i>within</i> the curtilage of the land to be leased which is the site of the former Chiefs Rugby Academy. This building has now been demolished and there is Herris fencing around the site. The required TPZs are compromised, including those around FLOW trees and soil has been piled up higher than the permitted 1m (see image attached) The FLOW trees were planted either by contractors or, in many cases, by community volunteers in the winter of 2018. They continue to be maintained by FLOW Orchard Guardians and Environment Agency contractors. We ask: - 1. To know how the maintenance is to be shared between the FLOW trees near the new changing rooms/classrooms building. 2. Whether there will be public access to these trees for the harvest of their fruits 3. That, if any FLOW trees are damaged or destroyed during the process of construction, they will be replaced by fruiting trees of our choice at a ratio of 5:1. This represents the number of years since these trees were planted and will help compensate for the amount of carbon sequestered by these mature trees as opposed to the young stock which will replace them. These trees will be planted in the autumn-winter after all the construction work has finished, having been ordered during the spring/summer before.	for the retained trees as part of the construction and environmental plant. Exeter College have been in direct communication with FLOW CIC throughout the project and any concerns raised have been passed to the relevant contractor for rectification where necessary. Exeter College already has a lease of the area concerned and access. by the community, to the trees will continue to be maintained under the new lease as it has been throughout the term of the current lease. Exeter College met with Cllr Tess Read, Nick Mead and the Environment Agency re: potential joint opportunities/working in this area for landscape maintenance, biodiversity gains etc

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15.	The Directors of FLOW CIC have recently been made aware of the ECC consultation about leasing two parcels of land to Exeter College in the Riverside Valley Park. The College have Planning Permission to construct an all-weather Rugby Pitch at Flowerpot Fields and new Changing Rooms and Classrooms on the site of the, now-demolished, Chiefs' Rugby Academy. This most recent consultation asks for comments on the <i>leasing</i> of the land. Some of the trees planted as part of the FLOW orchard project in 2018 lie within the curtilage of one of the parcels of land. Others will be affected during the construction process. Can you tell me, please, the implications for our project by the proposed leasing?	See No.14 above
16.	I reject to the change in plans regarding the rugby pitch increase in site size and that as was agreed by the Planning Committee on the 20th February 2023 in Planning application No 21/1710/FUL. During that meeting the Service Lead City Development added detail to original plan which stated, "allowing the existing playing fields to the south to be retained and unaltered and would be enclosed with security fencing and floodlighting;" Yet looking at the proposed location plan Drawing No PL02 Rev G the site is increased in size. This is therefore contrary what was agreed at the planning meeting. There is also concern regarding the ability of Grainge Architects to be able to produce plans with some degree of accuracy. A previous plan PL01 Rev C, showed the pitch to be 126 x 70m, now the PL02 Rev G, shows the site to be 106 x 68m. It is not clear on the plan legend as to the meaning of "perimeter 5m (enlarged by 2m on dugout side)" with regard to revision. Returning to the minutes of the 20/02/23 planning meeting Point 12, focuses on protecting trees and the Tree Protection Plan was recommended as being adhered to in full. Yet looking at the new proposal to enlarge the site, it appears that tress will be cut down as the red line is dissecting through trees. This is therefore contrary to what was agreed at the planning meeting and fails to protect retained trees within or near the site.	The plans attached to the consultation are the most up to date, which have been amended since the original planning application 21/1710. These amendments are being considered under application 24/0149/VOC. Under the conditions to planning consent 21/1710 the College are obliged to provide a tree protection plan for the retained trees as part of the construction and environmental plan.

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	Mr Strang said 'consideration' would be given to increasing the number of Sheffield steel cycle parking hoops, but this is not mentioned or considered in the documentation that has been provided, and I wonder how this sustainable aspect is aligning with the City Council's target that 50% of work trips originating in Exeter are to be made by foot or cycle by 2030.	
17.	I suppose it seems okay as long it doesn't disrupt the area too much and the students respect the surrounding area, times it's often busy and some of them being causing trouble walking along the path. Some proposals I would like to put forward would be better lighting or CCTV near the bridge under the track as poor local girl was raped down there. Maybe the local college could help with some local community work or put on events in the facility to help train youngsters or do family events to. Offset the building by donating some trees as. Sign of good will. Definitely bring the defibrillator back. Work with the local run group, city runs also to help improve health fitness in the area. Maybe the Exeter chiefs could give tickets to some residents too. I would also like to see something happen with the disused toilets nearby, use as shop or cafe maybe one day. So also, the local Exwick cricket team plays on that pitch, and I would hate they would have to move can you please integrate them also into the plan, I would like the space to be shared. Some ideas I think would be fine with residents we are very happy with Exeter city women in the area, so we welcome the Exeter city academy and college. Just help the local community and try to win them over, would be my proposal To be honest I think Exeter is great area for sports and I think Exwick should the leader for it.	One of the big aims of the project is to ensure access and enhance facilities available to not only Exeter College, but also young people, local groups and clubs from across the city and region, helping to increase participation in physical activity, improve wellbeing etc. The defibrillator has been installed on the new Centre for Rugby building. Exwick Cricket Club are a key community partner and have supported the project. The College engage with the community through the Exwick Sports Hub Partnership and undertook their own consultation on the development in addition to consultations by Planning and Estates. .

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18.	Re: Views invited on leasing land at Exwick Playing Fields to Exeter College Per the 16th August edition of Exeter City Council Latest News, I write to express my concerns about the proposed leasing of land at Exwick Playing Fields to Exeter College, specifically with respect to the proposal to install an all-weather rugby pitch. This land is currently a multi-purpose, open-access, community amenity which not only serves the needs of rugby training but is also open to all members of the community for a wide variety of activities, in addition to its importance to wildlife. The proposed change would have a significant negative impact on the wider community for the benefit of a small niche group of elite users. In particular: • The uses of the facility would be reduced from many to one. • The size of the community benefitting from the facility would be reduced by several orders of magnitude as a green space accessible to all is fenced off and access is limited to a select few. • Local wildlife would lose the benefits conferred by the green space currently present. • The environmental impact of all-weather pitches is extremely negative as they are constructed of materials which are made from irreplaceable fossil resources and which inevitably degrade over time, polluting the local environment, the sea, and ultimately, according to current research, all living things; micro-plastics are everywhere. The page describing the proposal (https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations-and-petitions/public-open-space-disposal/) contains only very limited information and says nothing about what the council hopes to receive in return for this significant curtailment of public amenity; we can only hope that it will be appropriate compensation. In summary, the information provided fails to make a case for what, on the face of it, seems like a very poor idea indeed.	One of the big aims of the project is to ensure access and enhance facilities available to not only Exeter College, but also young people, local groups and clubs from all across the city and region, helping to increase participation in physical activity, improve wellbeing etc. The planning process has to consider the pros and cons with a duty to take a weighted decision having regard to a wide range of factors including environmental impact. The Local Planning Authority have confirmed that use of astro turf as a pitch covering was considered as part of the original planning consent 21/1710