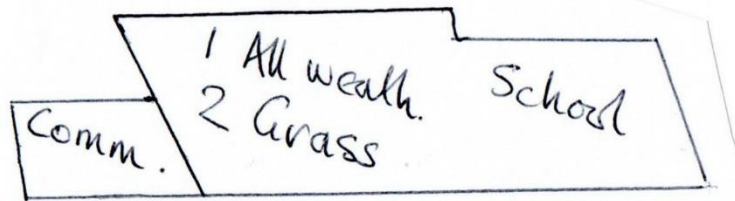


S 42 Planning Application to remove grass sports pitch from new Nairn Academy.

1. Provision at old Academy

When Nairn Academy building was opened in 1975 there was one blaes and two grass pitches as per diagram.



2. Lochdhu pitch

At the rear of Albyn Court/Lochdhu Gate there was also a community pitch provided by Albyn Housing as part of their development. This adjoined the Academy pitches and had free access to local Tradespark and Moss-side residents. As far as I know this pitch could also be used by the school.

3. In 2006 as a result of a prolonged community project to get the completely deteriorated blaes replaced by an all weather pitch, reconditioned floodlit grass pitch alongside that and community changing facilities, SportsScotland, the Lottery, INE, the Nairn Rotary and HC all contributed to the joint community/school facility.
4. The community side of it was run by its own management committee for several years, with hockey, football, athletics and rugby all represented. However at some point after 2012 the management was handed over to High Life Highland.
5. Therefore the facilities at Nairn Academy have, since 2006 been a joint community/school facility with community changing rooms, with the majority of funding from outwith the local authority. The Lochdhu pitch is also a community facility, and Registers of Scotland show that the title still appears to rests with Albyn along with the houses, so it is not clear that this pitch even belongs to Nairn Academy.
6. Notwithstanding this, the area has been fenced off from the public, and incorporated into Nairn Academy grounds, with a high padlocked gate where public access used to be taken. It is not clear how this happened.

Current Community Situation:

According to SportsScotland each local authority should undertake an inventory of all pitches in an area, and their condition, who manages them and the demand on them. This should be part of the planning process. (SportsScotland 'Guide to the Preparation of Sports Pitch Strategies')

Nairn is very short of community sports pitches according to football and rugby clubs and coaches, and the condition of most is poor, due to lack of proper maintenance and overuse.

Links 1 pitch v. poorly maintained with no facilities,

Riverside 1 pitch (overused) with facilities which are completely run down and inadequate, Showfield 1 pitch with facilities but required by the St Ninians mens, ladies, junior teams.

Lochloy – roughly marked out area, but v. poorly maintained - holes, glass, dog mess. Not used by teams.

Against this there is a huge amount of community team sport taking place, and Nairn Academy facilities such as the all weather pitch are being very intensively used by Nairn County (123 registered players and 87 in the 4-14 academy), their community FC, Nairn St Ninian, Rothes FC, and now a shinty club.

It is alleged that before the start of construction of the new academy the floodlit grass pitch had been allowed to fall into disrepair. SportsScotland states that 'Poor maintenance and neglect should not be used as a justification for the development of green infrastructure for other purposes.' (planning guidance 1001)

Sportscotland Planning Guidance

Sportscotland has very clear policies and planning guidance about providing adequate outdoor and indoor sports facilities and encouraging community hubs to allow community and schools to share and improve facilities together for the physical and mental health of the population.

‘Our vision is a Scotland where sport is a way of life.’ ‘Sportscotland believes that access to a network of quality places where people can get involved in sport is crucial to delivering these outcomes’

In addition Sportscotland lays down that each area should have an audit of all facilities in an area and a strategy before any decisions are made. As far as we can see this has not been done in Nairn.

National Planning Framework Policy 21

‘a) Development proposals which result in the loss of outdoor sports facilities will only be supported where the proposal: i. is ancillary to the principal use of the site as an outdoor sports facility; or ii. involves only a minor part of the facility and would not affect its use; or iii. meets a requirement to replace the facility which would be lost, either by a new facility or by upgrading an existing facility to provide a better quality facility. The location will be convenient for users and the overall playing capacity of the area will be maintained; or iv. can demonstrate that there is a clear excess of provision to meet current and anticipated demand in the area, and that the site would be developed without detriment to the overall quality of provision. This should be informed by the local authority’s Open Space Strategy and/or Play Sufficiency Assessment and in consultation with sportscotland where appropriate.’

Sportscotland Design Guidelines about School Facilities.

A school of 800 pupils should have 1 all weather and 2 grass pitches for the school. This does not include community use which would justify enhanced facilities. In addition a full size pitch for football etc. could not be replaced by another facility which did not allow the previous sport. (eg a mini pitch/MUGA or similar)

Plans for Nairn Academy

Stakeholder group meetings had emphasised that the site of the old school was to be used for facilities for the school once the old school was demolished. Otherwise the new school and playing fields would be on half the footprint of the previous site.

When the plans for the new Nairn Academy were presented to the Planning Committee in 2024 an additional full size grass pitch was requested to be put in the plans by Sportscotland as the playing field facilities did not conform to their guidelines. This was condition 16.

This is the condition which is now proposed to be removed and the academy left with 1 all weather pitch, and a community pitch which there is doubt even belongs to the school.

Conclusion:

No argument has been put forward as to why Nairn Academy should not have the requisite number of sports pitches recommended by Sportscotland and no alternative usage of the site has been proffered.

All sports clubs using local pitches are adamant that there is an acute shortage of pitches in Nairn against a burgeoning of teams and participants in outdoor team sports, which is a priority government policy. In addition the existing pitches are for the main part overused, in poor condition with poor or no changing facilities. It would appear that no attempt has been made by Highland Council to audit the number or condition of school/community facilities as tasked by Sportscotland.

A new school with properly built/ upgraded sports facilities should surely be a golden opportunity to redress the chronic lack of facilities in Nairn with a new impetus on shared use and community involvement.