



## **Nairn West & Suburban Community Council**

Sec.nwscc@gmail.com

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025

Case Officer John Kelly  
eplanning@highland.gov.uk

Dear Mr. Kelly

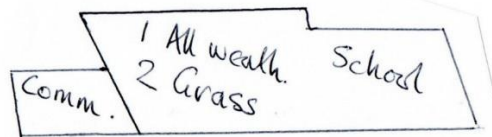
### **Re: 25/01160/s42 Application to remove grass sports pitch from new Nairn Academy.**

Nairn West and Suburban Community Council acting as consultees hereby object to condition 16 of planning application 23/05756/FUL being removed.

#### **1. Background to Nairn Academy Pitch Provision**

##### **(i) Provision at Original Academy -**

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



##### **(ii) Community Pitch – Lochdhu -**

Beyond the west boundary of the Academy, as per the diagram, existed a community pitch provided by Albyn Housing as part of their development. This adjoined the Academy pitches and gave free access to local Tradespark and Moss-side residents, but was not a school pitch, nor was it included in the school footprint. It would probably also be available to be used by the school.

##### **(iii) Community Facilities at Nairn Academy -**

In 2006, as a result of a prolonged community project, the completely deteriorated blaes was replaced by an all-weather pitch, reconditioned floodlit grass pitch alongside that and community changing facilities. Sportscotland, the Lottery, INE, the Nairn Rotary and Highland Council all contributed to the joint community/school facility.

##### **(iv) 'Adoption' of Lochdhu Pitch -**

The Lochdhu community pitch according to Registers of Scotland shows that the title still appears to rest with Albyn along with the houses. Notwithstanding this, the area has been fenced-off from the public and incorporated into the Academy grounds, with a high padlocked gate where public access used to be taken. It is not clear how and why this happened and whether Nairn Academy has any ownership rights over this pitch.

#### **2. Objections:**

- a) No audit/inventory appears to have been undertaken of pitch numbers and condition in the Nairn Academy catchment area to inform the application to reduce pitch availability at Nairn Academy.

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.

**Sportscotland Planning Guidance** - '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 local authority should have a written pitch strategy and undertake an inventory of all facilities/pitches in each area and their condition, who manages them and the demand on them. This should be part of the development planning process and guide planning applications. (Sportscotland 'Guide to the Preparation of Sports Pitch Strategies').

As far as we can see this has not been done in Nairn prior to this application and, therefore, a reasoned judgement cannot be made on what the sports pitch needs of Nairn and its school are.

**b) According to football and rugby coaches and users, Nairn is very short of usable and available sports pitches.**

Nairn has for a long time been 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. Against this is a rising number of participants and burgeoning women's teams also requiring pitch access.

Outwith the school, there are only two community pitches which can be hired for organised team sports, the Links (overused and with no facilities) and Riverside (overused with facilities which are run-down and inadequate.)

There is a huge amount of community team sport taking place in Nairn and Nairn Academy facilities such as the all-weather pitch are being very intensively used by Nairn County FC (123 registered players and 87 in the 4-14 academy), Nairn County's Community FC and Nairn St Ninian FC. Currently, Rothes FC also uses the facility for training. The Links pitch is used by social teams and Nairn County juniors, and for some rugby. The Riverside pitch is used for training and matches by Riverside Thistle, Nairn County seniors, Nairn County youth teams (3 groups) and Nairn County community FC (4 groups).

**c) Poor maintenance, rather than lack of demand, has caused deterioration and reduced usage of Academy pitches**

Although the 2006 project saw Nairn Academy provided with a reconditioned floodlit grass pitch, this pitch has apparently over the years been allowed to fall into disrepair. Sportscotland 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)

In addition, we have been told from various sources that the school pitch access has been hampered by poor maintenance of the grass areas, 'lack of availability' of staff to provide access, and major cost increases.

Therefore, reduction in use of grass pitches at Nairn Academy cannot be put down to the facility not being required.

**d) Removal of the second grass pitch contravenes Sportscotland Planning and Design Guidance.**

According to Sportscotland 'School Playing Fields Planning and Design Guidance', a school of 800 pupils should (for their curricular and extra-curricular use) have one all weather and two grass pitches for the school. (p22) 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. (e.g. a mini pitch/MUGA or similar)

**e) Removal of the second grass pitch contravenes National Planning Framework 4, Policy 21.**

National Planning Framework 4 Policy 21 states: *'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.*

It is clear that this application would lead to fewer pitch facilities than the previous school when there is already an acute shortage of pitches in the town.

**f) Community and Consultee input into planning called for school Facilities to replace the demolished Academy**

Nairn Academy Stakeholder Group meetings emphasised that the site of the old school should be used for facilities for the new school once the old school was demolished. Otherwise, the new school and playing fields would be on half the footprint of the previous site. As it is the pitch layout is not ideal with widely separated facilities at each end of the school reducing informal use and flexibility.

When the plans for the new Nairn Academy were presented to the Planning Committee in June 2024, Sportscotland recommended that an additional full-size grass pitch be added as the playing field facilities had one grass pitch too few and did not conform to their guidelines, which was reflected in condition 16. If this condition were to be removed, it would leave Nairn Academy with one all-weather pitch and a grass pitch which there is doubt even belongs to the school.

**3. Conclusions:**

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 number of participants in outdoor team sports, which is a priority government policy. In addition, the existing community pitches are for the main part overused and in poor condition with limited 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 represents a golden opportunity to redress the chronic lack of facilities in Nairn with a new emphasis on affordable shared use and community involvement, as promoted in government and Sportscotland guidelines.

We, therefore, request that you to refuse this application, which would sell the youngsters of Nairn short and provide inadequate outdoor sports facilities for our new school and community.

Yours Sincerely,



Chair, NWSCC