Officer Report

Application: EPF/2039/26
Site: Old Loughtonians Hockey Club, Luxborough Lane, Chigwell
Proposal: Indoor sports training facility
Green Belt: Yes
Recommendation: Object

Proposal and Planning History

The application is for a steel-framed sports building measuring 30m × 15m and approximately 8m high, for hockey training, futsal, other sporting activities and equipment storage.

EPF/0687/24 - Approved June 2025

Four covered padel courts beneath an approximately 11m-high canopy, with a converted shipping container for reception and storage. An existing overflow parking area used by the hockey club was to be resurfaced and laid out to provide 68 marked spaces, shared with the padel facility.

EPF/1427/26 - Approved September 2026

Changes to the court and parking layout, replacing the shipping container with a permanent clubhouse. The four courts and 68 parking spaces remained unchanged.

EPF/2039/26 - Current application

A further, fully enclosed 450m² sports hall beside the existing hockey pitches, separate from the approved padel development.

Officer Assessment

Green Belt

The Parish Council objected to both previous applications on Green Belt grounds. The new building would introduce further built development onto the site. Its cumulative impact on Green Belt openness and whether the proposed indoor uses satisfy the sporting facilities exception remain concerns under Local Plan Policy DM4 and national Green Belt policy.

Parking and Traffic

The original padel permission formalised an existing hockey club overflow car park into 68 marked spaces for shared use. The amended transport assessment estimated that padel users could occupy up to 50 of these spaces at peak times, leaving 18 for hockey overflow parking. The existing main car park, containing approximately 84-86 spaces, also serves the hockey club and school.

The Essex Parking Guidance (2024) specifies one space per 20m² of public area for indoor sports halls, indicating up to 23 spaces for the proposed building.

No additional parking is proposed. Although shared parking is permitted under the Essex guidance, the submitted assessment does not demonstrate that sufficient spaces would be available when the hockey pitches, padel courts and new sports hall are operating simultaneously. Compliance with the Essex Parking Standards and Local Plan Policy T1 has therefore not been demonstrated.

Epping Forest SAC

The original padel development was assessed as generating 100 additional daily vehicle movements, including 68 through Epping Forest SAC and its 200m buffer. The additional traffic impact of the proposed sports hall, alongside the existing and approved facilities, has not been demonstrated.

Flood Risk and Drainage

The building would be close to Chigwell Brook. The submitted plans do not clearly establish compliance with the watercourse setback requirements of Policy DM17. EFDC's Land Drainage response also contains contradictory statements about the site's flood-zone status.

Trees and Ecology

No significant concerns have been identified, subject to appropriate conditions.

Officer Recommendation

Object. Although the benefits of improved sporting provision are recognised, the proposal raises concerns about the cumulative impact on Green Belt openness, insufficient evidence of compliance with Essex Parking Standards, additional traffic impacts and unresolved watercourse and flood-risk matters.

Recommended Parish Council Comments to EFDC

Chigwell Parish Council objects to the application.

The Parish Council notes the previous permissions for four covered padel courts and a clubhouse. The current application proposes a further substantial enclosed building in a separate part of the Green Belt site. The Council remains concerned about the cumulative impact on openness and compliance with Policy DM4 and national Green Belt policy.

The Parish Council also objects on parking grounds. The original padel development formalised an existing hockey club overflow parking area into 68 spaces for shared use. The subsequent transport assessment estimated that padel users could occupy up to 50 of these spaces, leaving 18 for hockey overflow parking.

The Essex Parking Guidance (2024) specifies one space per 20m² of public area for indoor sports halls. No additional parking is proposed, and the submitted information does not demonstrate that existing provision can accommodate the combined demand from the hockey club, padel courts and proposed sports hall. Compliance with the Essex Parking Standards and Local Plan Policy T1 has not been established.

The Parish Council also has concerns about the additional traffic impact on Epping Forest SAC, the proximity of the building to Chigwell Brook under Policy DM17 and the contradictory flood-risk information in the drainage consultation response.

For these reasons, the Parish Council objects to the application as submitted.