

Comment re the Proposal to Delete REC54 (Strawberry Grounds) from the Local Plan (Modification Reference MAM27)

I welcomed the Planning Inspector's proposal to delete REC54 (Strawberry Grounds) from the Local Plan. However, I have since read Furness Rugby Union Football Club's arguments for appealing against the decision (EL22 005) and would like to make the following points:

1. FRUFC states that '*BBC did not object to the inclusion of the Site on any basis*'. However, Barrow Borough Council had been given to believe that the land was not in sporting use, '*The owners ... have informed the Council they are no longer in sporting use*'. Had they been given the true facts that the pitches were in fact used by Furness Rovers, an amateur football club; and, given the Council's stance on '*preventing the loss of sports pitches and facilities in the borough*', plus their championing of '*grassroots sport*' (North West Mail 09/07/2018), I feel it is possible that the Council might well have not included the proposed development in the Local Plan.
2. I reaffirm Jonathan Lightfoot's opinion in his Response to the Main Modifications (EL22 008) that FRUFC offers no evidence to back up their suggestion that there are facilities no longer used. Regarding the 7 sites FRUFC lists as being no longer used: the former Parkview School and Risedale School pitches are used by Furness Academy; the former Thorncliffe School, Earnsie Bay and Park Vale sites are used by Barrow and District League Clubs; the Thorncliffe fields, known as the Youth Fields, cannot be used due to flooding problems, and the fields at the rear of Victoria School were developed on some years ago.
3. FRUFC says that Furness Rovers have given notice on their rental of the pitches. I would stress that Furness Rovers only started looking for an alternative site when they became concerned that parents were saying they were planning on taking their children to other clubs because of the uncertainty of the proposed development as they were worried that, if the development did go ahead, there would be nowhere for their children to play. The '*underused facility*' Furness Rugby mentions that Furness Rovers is moving to is, in fact, a pitch privately owned by Chetwynde School which Furness Rovers will have sole-rights to use in the evenings and at weekends when it is not being used by the school. This pitch was previously used by Furness Cavaliers Junior team, who own one pitch that is used by their Seniors, but, because they currently have no other permanent site, have to change venues week by week for their Juniors.
4. FRUFC claims that team sports are dying a slow death in Barrow and seems to believe that the need for playing fields in Barrow does not currently exist, nor will it exist in the future and that the pitches on Strawberry Grounds are surplus to requirements; but members of the Barrow and District League Clubs would disagree. Hawcoat Park Juniors, who, as well as having pitches at Hawcoat Park and the former Thorncliffe School pitches, are looking to expand even further as they are short of pitches. Nick Ellis, a coach at Hawcoat Park, believes that Junior football is thriving in this town and that, with the lack of pitches, feels it would be totally unacceptable for more pitches to be sold off for housing developments. Chris Banks, Crooklands Casuals Football Club's Junior Secretary, says that, as well as owning their own pitch, Crooklands uses Furness Academy for training and matches but they are currently short of playing areas and are now at the point of turning youngsters away in all age groups, which he feels is a shame, as he believes it is important to encourage youngsters because they are the future of the clubs. He feels that no attempt by Furness Rugby has been made to offer the pitches to local sports clubs, so their presumption that they are not needed is false. Chris feels that it is vital that the town keeps hold of any existing sporting facilities that it has, as, once they are gone, they are gone forever leaving very little opportunity for sport in the town.

It is difficult to see how FRUFC can justify saying that the loss of sports pitches would be of benefit to sport in Barrow as, without the pitches to play on, team sports cannot survive and sport will die, not a slow death, but rather a quick death in Barrow. Also, if FRUFC's fortunes should change allowing them to expand, where will all their new teams play if they only have the one pitch?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment and I await the final outcome.

Regards
Linda Bolton