



House of Commons
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Robert Seely MBE MP

Sent Via Email

Mr Tim Hollingsworth OBE
Chief Executive, Sport England
21 Bloomsbury Street
London
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5th November 2019

Dear Mr Hollingsworth

Smallbrook Ice & Leisure Centre

I am writing to seek your intervention in respect of the above, which is the subject of a planning application to the Isle of Wight Council (REF: 19/00310/FUL; SE Ref: PA/19/SE/IW/52739).

I have met the local promoters of this project, who are seeking to meet an identified need for an ice rink (and related sporting facilities) in my constituency. As the local MP, I have sought (since first being elected in 2017) to address the situation of the Island's longstanding ice rink on Ryde seafront being closed by the property's owners. Regrettably this situation has not yet been resolved (and there is no likely prospect of it being so), thereby denying my constituents access to an ice rink, which was popular and well-used.

The proposals for the Smallbrook Ice & Leisure Centre are therefore very welcome. However, Sport England (SE) has objected to these proposals as they are considered to result in the loss of a playing field. Recently the applicant has submitted a detailed Benefits Case to SE to seek to overcome the concern, but I understand that Owen Neal (the Planning Manager) is still objecting on behalf of your organisation, with the most recent response having been received last week.

I have now been advised by Ryde School (the owner of the land in question) that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the status of the land on which the facility is proposed to be built. This has arisen because of some Google Earth images which show pitches marked out on the land. However, this is a historical image, which relates to the very temporary use of this land by the school during 2015 when one of its own pitches (co-located with the school in Ryde town centre) was out of action due to a sink hole. Because of the latter, the school moved junior rounders to the Smallbrook site and marked out the pitch for this purpose. This subsequently ceased once the school site was brought back into active use.

I understand that the land at Smallbrook (as a grassed field on uneven land) is simply not suitable for a playing pitch; nor has it been used as such for anything but on a very short-term, temporary basis. I

therefore do not believe it is right to consider the potential use of this land for built sport facilities to constitute the loss of a playing pitch.

I can appreciate that SE is rightly focused on protecting and enhancing sport facilities, which is why a cautious approach has been adopted in relation to these proposals. But given the information I have set out above, I hope that SE's stance can now be revisited. In particular, I would be grateful if Mr Neal (and / or some of his other colleagues) could visit the Isle of Wight in the near future to meet with the applicant and the Isle of Wight Council on site to examine the land in question. I am confident that this would enable a more informed approach to be taken.

It is expected that this application will be determined by the Isle of Wight Council's Planning Committee on Tuesday 26th November. It would be helpful if a visit could take place in advance of then, so that members' deliberations on this application can have regard for the outcome of such on-site considerations by SE.

As you will be aware, Parliament is due to be dissolved tomorrow (Wednesday) and therefore I will no longer be the Island's MP. However this is an issue which needs to be progressed during the month ahead, and I would therefore be grateful if you could perhaps write to the Isle of Wight Council Leader (Cllr Dave Stewart) in response, and also liaise with his officers to arrange a site visit. The Council's Sports Unit (who are currently developing a Playing Pitch Strategy) do not consider this site to be part of the Island's playing pitch portfolio, and are therefore supportive of this land being put to good use for alternative sports use – as proposed. There is a desperate requirement to improve sporting provision on the Island – and in particular to secure a replacement ice rink to meet the existing local need.

If you wish to get in touch with me directly, I can be contacted (from tomorrow) on bob@bobseely.org.uk.

I am also copying this letter to relevant councillors and officers in the Isle of Wight Council, Owen Neal at Sport England and Nigel Adams MP (the Minister of State for Sport). I intend to discuss with the latter in the near future, to seek his support in working towards a positive resolution on this matter.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Seely', with a horizontal line underneath.

Bob Seely MP

CC: Cllr Dave Stewart (Leader, Isle of Wight Council)
Cllr Chris Quirk (Chairman, Planning Committee, Isle of Wight Council)
John Metcalfe (Chief Executive, Isle of Wight Council)
Lee Matthews (Recreation & Open Spaces Manager, Isle of Wight Council)
Maria Bishop (Planning Officer, Isle of Wight Council)
Owen Neal (Planning Manager, Sport England)
Nigel Adams MP (Minister of State for Sport, Media & Creative Industries, DCMS)