



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-321628-25

Development	Erection of ball stop netting on eastern boundary of grass pitch and all ancillary works.
Location	Longford Rugby Club, Demesne, Lisbrack Road, Longford.
Planning Authority	Longford County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	2460157
Applicant(s)	Longford Rugby Club
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Grant Permission
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellant(s)	John & Pauline Lyons
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	24 th of March 2025
Inspector	Darragh Ryan

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The existing rugby grounds are located in the townland of Demesne on the north western edge of Longford town. The rugby grounds are accessed off Lisbarck road and are bounded to the north and east by residential development.
- 1.2. The area of the proposed development is to the south east of the development adjacent to existing astro turf pitch. To the east of the pitch is a local cul de sac road (Tennis Court Lane) with three houses which is accessed off Demesne Lane. Longford Tennis club is located to the South of the pitch. The site area is stated at 4.16 hectares.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The applicant proposes to erect ball stop netting on the eastern boundary of astro turf pitch attached to existing flood lights.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

- 3.1. Longford County Council issued a Decision to grant permission subject to 5 conditions. The conditions are standard in nature and refer to construction management practices and surface water management.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

- 3.2.1. There are 2 Planning Reports on file. The planning report considered the following:
 - The planning authority had insufficient information to make a complete assessment of the development proposal. Further information was sought for elevations of the proposed netting, including overall heights and the material the proposed nets will be made from. Full details of potential overshadowing is also sought.
 - The site is zoned Recreation, Amenity and Green Spaces within the Longford County Development plan 2021 – 2027.

- Upon receipt of further information planning authority were satisfied that there would be no overshadowing associated with the proposed netting and the details submitted regarding elevations with respect to ball netting is also deemed acceptable. A decision to grant permission was recommended based on the above.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- None

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

- None

3.4. Third Party Observations

There are three submissions on file. The issues raised can be summarised as follows:

- No details provided as to the height or scale of netting. Not details as to the type of netting proposed.
- The existing lighting is causing significant light pollution to houses in the local area.
- The netting would give rise to overshadowing of properties.
- The netting will be visually obtrusive and will tower over properties
- There is no need for the netting as only a few balls are kicked across the road
- The nets will cause a disturbance to birds and the natural environment

Photographs have been provided indicating height level and expected level of impact.

4.0 Planning History

- 4.1.1. Pa reg ref 20-41 – Planning permission granted for the proposed construction of a multi purposes artificial grass pitch to service existing clubhouse together with

erection of a new wire mesh fence of 2.4m in height, upgrading of the existing pitch lighting and all ancillary works

- 4.1.2. PA reg ref 18-102 – Planning permission granted for the proposed additional use of existing recently constructed extension to existing rugby club which was granted full planning permission under planning reference number PL17/112 to be used primarily for youth rugby whereby it is now proposed to also use this extension as a crèche/montessori school and all ancillary works at Longford Rugby Club,
- 4.1.3. PA reg ref 17-112 - Planning permission granted for the proposed construction of a single storey extension to the front of existing clubhouse to consist of a First Aid room, WC and wheelchair accessible WC, general purpose room with kitchen area all of which will be primarily for youth Rugby and all ancillary works at Longford Rugby Club,
- 4.1.4. PA reg ref 08-700067 – Planning permission granted for a proposed extension to the side of the existing single storey club house along with the modifications to the existing ground floor internal layout, new roof and stone cladding to the existing entrance, connection to sewer and all ancillary site works.
- 4.1.5. PA reg ref 08-700017 – Planning permission granted for proposed first floor extension to the existing single storey club house, an addition of a two storey lift and stairwell to the west elevation and modifications to the existing ground floor internal layout and all ancillary site works
- 4.1.6. Pa reg ref 05-700040 – Planning permission was granted for proposed alterations to both the internal road layout and open space to service a housing scheme this was previously granted planning permission under Planning Reference Number PL 04/89 together with the construction of a separate entrance to exit out onto the Lisbrack Road, boundary fence/wall and ancillary site works

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Longford County Development Plan

CPO 7.4.8 - Support the provision of multi-purpose sports halls, all-weather playing pitches and associated facilities in appropriate locations and promote the provision, improvement and expansion of sports facilities within the County subject to normal

planning criteria and the proper planning and sustainable development of the County.

5.2. Natural Heritage Designations

- Brown Bog SAC (002346) 2.9km to the west of the proposed site.
- Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101) 3.5km to the west of the proposed site.
- Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818) 3.5km to the west of the proposed site

6.0 EIA Screening

The current application before the Board does not constitute a class of development for which EIAR is required.

7.0 The Appeal

7.1. This is a third party appeal against the Decision of Longford County Council to grant permission. The appeal is made from a resident of Tennis Court Lane.- east of the site. The Grounds of Appeal can be summarised as follows:

7.1.1. Impact on residential amenity

- The net will obstruct the view of the sunset from property
- The rugby club has already installed very bright lights that are turned on many evenings until 10p.m. The lights create an excessive glare forcing residents to keep curtains closed.
- The high netting will significantly and negatively impact the character and enjoyment of properties. The visual prominence height and scale will overshadow residences reducing natural light and harming the aesthetic of the surrounding area.

7.1.2. Environmental Concerns and Visual Impact

- The proposed net is located near mature ash trees and hedges. Construction and installation may damage these tree/hedges or their root systems. The

large net will create an industrial appearance in a residential area, affecting the character of the landscape and potentially lowering the values on the lane.

7.1.3. Limited need for the net and lack of consultation

- The proposed development appears unnecessary given that only a small number of rugby balls currently enter our property and the properties of neighbours. The scale of the proposed net is disproportionate to the actual issue.
- The club attempted to erect the proposed net without planning. The lack of consultation undermines the principles of transparency and community engagement in the planning process. The two existing ball nets are not referenced in the original planning application 20/41.
- Concerns raised regarding procedure and impartiality.

7.2. **Applicant Response**

- The applicant sets out that owing to distance from properties on Tennis Court Lane, colour of netting and size of opes on the nets the netting will be barely visible against the ambient background from the appellants house. All aspects of the ambient background will be visible through the netting. Its submitted the visual impact of the netting will be very small.
- The reference to light pollution is exaggerated. There has been floodlights at this location since the 1970's and these were upgraded under 20/41 application. The appellants have provided no evidence of glare indicated.
- Given the size of the individual strands of net (3mm) and the distance from houses on Tennis Court Lane, the potential for overshadowing is inconsequential. The nets adjacent to the existing tennis court have not caused any overshadowing or interference on existing tennis court and these nets are much closer than the nets will be to the existing houses on Tennis Court Lane. The existing nets have not interfered with the with hedges, bushes etc in their vicinity.
- There is a clear need for the netting. The club has to dedicate volunteers to the collection of balls during matches and training sessions. An example is

given of balls going over the boundary 5 times in one game. Its not conceivable that the adjacent residents can be expected to be present at all times to give back the balls. The absence of a net results in a trespass which is an unnecessary risk for the club and individuals.

- There will be limited works to be undertaken to erect nets. Any ground works will be confined to two small holes dug adjacent to the mesh fence, where there is existing stone fill in place. These filled holes will act as an anchor point for stay wires that will support the net at either end. There will be no interference with existing soil. All other works are to existing lighting poles.
- The rugby club was unaware of requirement to obtain planning for erecting the ball stop netting. After receiving professional advice, it was decided to apply for permission.

7.3. Planning Authority Response

- None

7.4. Observations

- None

8.0 Assessment

8.1.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the appeal, having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant national and local policy and guidance, I consider the main issues in relation to this appeal are as follows:

- Visual Impact/ Overshadowing
- Other Issues
- Appropriate Assessment

8.2. Visual Impact/ Overshadowing

- 8.2.1. The appellant contends that the proposed development will have an obtrusive visual impact and result in overshadowing of properties along Tennis Court Lane. It is further asserted that the appearance of the netting will introduce an industrial character to the residential area, potentially leading to a devaluation of properties. In response, the applicant argues that the netting's characteristics—specifically its green colour, 3mm-wide strands, and its distance from neighbouring properties—will mitigate any significant visual impact or overshadowing. Furthermore, the applicant highlights that the ambient background will remain visible through the netting, minimising any perception of intrusion.
- 8.2.2. The proposed netting will be affixed to existing lighting standards and a wire mesh fence, with stay wires secured in concrete-filled holes adjacent to the existing fence. The structure will extend to a height of 9.4 metres and span nearly the entire length of the playing pitch, measuring 79 metres. The netting is situated approximately 15 metres from the nearest residential dwelling on Tennis Court Lane. Additionally, a number of mature ash trees exist between the proposed netting and Tennis Court Lane, further contributing to visual screening.
- 8.2.3. There are no specific policies within the Longford County Development Plan that directly address the proposed development in relation to residential amenity. The applicant has demonstrated a clear functional need for the ball-stop netting, which aligns with both the facility's use and the zoning matrix for the area. Given the distance between the netting and residential dwellings, it is considered that the visual impact will not be significant. Moreover, the presence of the existing tree line and the netting's fine 3mm strands will help to mitigate any adverse visual effects. To further address concerns regarding visual impact, and in recognition of the nature of the rugby grounds, it is recommended that a condition be imposed requiring a net aperture (opes) standard of 125mm. This measure will enhance transparency through the netting and further minimise any potential visual impact.
- 8.2.4. With regard to overshadowing, it is not considered that the proposed netting presents a reasonable potential for such an effect. By its nature, the netting is transparent, allowing for visibility of the ambient background. Additionally, increasing the net aperture to 125mm will further reduce any perceived loss of light. In this

context, the existing mature tree line has a greater potential for overshadowing than the proposed development. In conclusion, I do not consider visual impact and overshadowing constitute substantial grounds for refusal of planning permission in this instance.

8.3. Other Issues

8.3.1. Lighting/ Procedure

The appellant refers to the extent of light pollution from the existing light standards on site. All lighting was permitted under previous planning permission 20/41 by Longford County Council. The applicant has made references to procedural issues regarding the assessment of a previous application on site by Longford County Council. I do not consider this matter to be a material consideration in the determination of the current application before the Board. Issues relating to planning enforcement fall within the jurisdiction of the local authority and are therefore beyond the remit of An Bord Pleanála.

8.3.2. Need for the Ball stop Net

The appellant sets out that there is no requirement for the ball stop net at this location, as the number of times any balls are kicked over the boundary is minimal. The applicant sets out a number of incidents of where the balls have been kicked out over the boundary. Also its set out the club relies mostly on volunteers to retrieve rugby balls from adjacent properties which requires gaining access to private properties. I consider based on the level of detail supplied by the applicant in this instance that the applicant has demonstrated adequate need for the netting.

Based on the evidence presented and my observations on-site, I consider the appellant's concerns to be either beyond the scope of this appeal or satisfactorily addressed by the applicant. No substantive issues arise that would warrant refusal of the application.

8.3.3. Conditions

I note that the planning authority have included condition 5 as follows:

"Any alterations to the development required in order to increase energy efficiency, passive house or solar heating, use of renewable energy resources and/or comply

with national building codes of practices shall be submitted to the planning authority for its agreement prior to commencement of such development.”

In this instance as the application is for ball stop netting, I do not consider the addition of the above condition is necessary. There is no power required for the operation of the netting and the issue of renewable energy is not relevant to this application.

9.0 AA Screening

I have considered the proposal to erect ball stop netting in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

The subject site is located 2.9km from the nearest European Site Brown Bog SAC (002346). The development proposal consists of construction of ball stop netting.

Having considered the nature, scale, and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any European Site. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- scale and nature of the development]
- Location-distance from nearest European site and lack of connections

I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (stage 2) (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

10.0 Recommendation

For the reasons outlined above, I consider that the proposal is in compliance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, and I recommend that permission is GRANTED subject to the following conditions.

11.0 Reasons and Considerations

It is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed erection of ball stop netting will not have significant negative impact on amenity of neighbouring properties. Owing to the nature of the development and existing mature boundary it is considered that the level of visual impact will be minimal, from the perspective of neighbouring residential dwellings. Having regard to the foregoing it is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the development would, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

12.0 Conditions

1. The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application and by the plans and particulars received by An Bord Pleanála, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. The proposed netting as erected shall have a minimum aperture (open between strands) of 125mm. Full details of manufacture and specification of the netting shall be submitted to the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity

3. Surface water arising from the proposed development shall not adversely affect or unduly impair existing land or road drainage in the vicinity of the site.

Reason: In the interests of proper planning and sustainable development.

4. All necessary measures shall be taken by the developer to prevent any spillage or deposition of clay, dust, rubble or other debris, whether arising from the vehicle or otherwise, on adjoining and/or adjacent public road network during the course of the construction works

In the interest of road safety

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Darragh Ryan
Planning Inspector

3rd of April 2025

Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	321628-25		
Proposed Development Summary	Erection of Ball stop netting		
Development Address	Longford Rugby Club, Demesne, Lisbrack Road, Longford		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	
		No	X
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?			
Yes			
No	X	Not a Class of Development	
3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?			
Yes			
No	X	Not a Class of Development	

4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?			
Yes			

5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No	X	Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q4)
Yes		

Inspector: _____ Date: _____