



# British Model Flying Association

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Dear Sirs

It is with some disappointment that we are forced to contact you regarding Cheshire East Councils continued disregard of a long established sports club, Smithy Model Aircraft Club, whose facility will be lost if this development goes ahead.

In our consultation response of 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, we pointed out that the application did not comply with the requirements of the NPPF Paragraph 97 (now 99 since July 2021) which states:

*Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*

- A) An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- B) The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provisions in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- C) The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

NPPF Para 99 is also reinforced by Policy SC2 of the Local Plan Strategy for indoor and outdoor sports facilities which states:

*In order to provide appropriate outdoor sports facilities for the communities of Cheshire East, the Council will;*

*Protect existing indoor and outdoor sports facilities, unless:*

*Either:*

- i. They are proven to be surplus to need (56); or*
- i. Improved alternative provision (57) will be created in a location well related to the functional requirements of the relocated use and its existing and future users.*

At the time of our initial consultation response the Sports Needs Assessment made no mention of Model Aircraft Flying. In December 2021 an addendum to the SNA was submitted which attempted to meet the requirements of Para 99 but in our opinion fails to do so. We also believe that there was a failure by the planning department who should have sought further consultation with us after the addendum was submitted.

The addendum uses the Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG) which is a recognised approach to undertaken sports needs assessments and comprises of the following elements

- **Quantity** - what facilities and how many there are in the area?

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The body delegated by the Royal Aero Club for the control, regulation and administration of the sport of model flying.  
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- **Quality** - how good they are?
- **Accessibility** - where they are located?
- **Availability** - how available they are?

The ANOG Analysis revealed that there are 17 Model Aircraft Clubs within a 15-miles (20-minutes) catchment area of the Smithy Model Flying Club site, including Smithy.

In relation to Model Aircraft Flying the analysis concluded:

*There appears to be good alternative levels of provision in the catchment where any displaced members could reasonably access model flying opportunities. There are numerous opportunities for displaced members to continue their activities at other sites and clubs. There are choices, which can be made, which will not result in displaced users or members not being able to access alternative opportunities.*

*The quality of the alternatives is also good, with all alternatives affiliated to the BMFA, with appropriate insurances and health and safety procedures ensuring a safe and high-quality experience. All of these would appear to be accessible to Smithy members to accommodate most if not all the flying categories.*

*All clubs appear to be open to new members and people enjoying opportunities on a casual basis, there does not appear to be any cost barriers and indeed most clubs appear to enjoy all year-round flying opportunities, so restrictions appear limited. There therefore appears to be capacity and availability in the catchment to absorb the members, which may be displaced.*

Unfortunately, this bears little resemblance to reality, it appears that those who compiled this amendment made no attempt to contact the clubs to get an accurate reflection of the current situation in the area or sought the advice of any individual with any familiarity with model aircraft flying.

It is often the case that many model flying clubs have conditions they must comply with relating to number of members in the club, number of members that can fly at any one time, hours of operation restrictions and model aircraft types. When those factors are taken in to account the picture is very different.

The 17 clubs have been contacted and the following information which is extremely relevant is not covered in the amendment and it materially effects the outcome.

*Bramhall area thermal and slope soaring club.* This is a glider club which equates to around 5 percent of the models owned by members of Smithy Model Aircraft Club. The Site is severely restricted to a few hours a week and only open when the school is closed. This club is completely unsuitable for the needs of the Smithy club members.

*East Cheshire Model flying club,* this club is more suited to their needs but is not taking new members and indeed has a waiting list to join. Also the site they use is not suitable for gas turbine planes or large scale aircraft.

*Hough End Model aircraft club* 23mins drive in good traffic conditions. 40mins drive in peak hours. Severely restricted flying times because this is a public playing field. 4 hours on wed, 4 hours on fri, 3 ½ hours on sun.

*Parkway Model aircraft club* do not allow helicopters or drone aircraft, it also is not suitable for large scale aircraft or turbines. The maximum number of members from the Smithy club that they could accept is 10

*Sale Model Aircraft Club,* The maximum number of members from the Smithy club that they could accept is 10 also they do not permit large scale aircraft or Turbines.

*Phoenix Model Aircraft Club* has a cap of 40 members and currently has a waiting list to join.

*Knutsford Model Aircraft Club* is situated in Tatton Park the club has a low cost membership because the members have to pay the gate fees every time they attend. This is currently £8.00. For a member that attends on average 3 times a week, a not unreasonable suggestion, this equates to over £1200 per annum. When the club secretary was contacted he could not confirm the club could accept new members.

*Cheshire model flying club* have a cap of 30 members and they are fully subscribed.

*Manchester Squadron model flying club* does not exist anymore.

The remaining clubs included in the report are not within the catchment area but have similar restrictions on membership.

The reality is that less than half the current membership could possibly be accommodated at other clubs in the area and of course dispersing the membership across other model flying sites means that the club itself is lost. A model flying club is much more than the provision of somewhere to fly model aircraft, it is also a social club where friendships are forged and is often a focus for the social aspects of life for it's members.

When the above factors are given consideration it is simply not possible to state that ***"An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements"*** and therefore the development does not comply with either the NPPF or the Local Plan Policy SC2.

The club and the BMFA understand the need for local housing developments however the apparent complete disregard of the club as a stakeholder, especially when there is some considerable regard (and financial assistance) paid to non-stakeholder sports is simply unacceptable.

If the club flying site is to be lost to this development it is essential that some mitigation is put in place and we are seeking to work with the council to ensure this is appropriate and that all members of the Smithy Club are able to continue their sporting activities in the future.

We would very much appreciate your response to the above comments and would like to discuss possible mitigation for this loss in the event the development goes ahead.

We look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Symons', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Andy Symons  
BMFA Club Support Officer