



## COPTHALL SPORTS HUB & MILL HILL OPEN SPACES MASTERPLAN PHASE 2 & 3 REPORT

*"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair." Nelson Mandela*

Saracens would like to thank the London Borough of Barnet for engaging with the organisation during the development of the Cophall Sports Hub & Mill Hill Park Open Spaces Master Plan and for now providing the opportunity to comment on Phase 2 & 3. Saracens welcome the publication of the draft Masterplan and its ambitious aspirations, much of which reflects Saracens original vision when we first acquired the Cophall Stadium. Saracens are keen to continue to play an active role in supporting the further development and delivery of community sports facilities at Cophall.

Saracens is very supportive of future investment in parks and open spaces and believes strongly in the need for high quality open spaces for residents. Parks and open spaces play a vital role in communities and can contribute considerably to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. With the forecasted population growth in Barnet in the years ahead the need for high quality open spaces is going to be even greater. Cophall and some of the other parks and open spaces within this master plan have undoubtedly suffered from a lack of investment in recent times which has led to the provision of relatively poor facilities and subsequent underutilisation.

Saracens recognises that the Masterplan includes proposals for several open spaces within Mill Hill, but we highlight that most of our focus in this response is on the proposals set out for the Cophall site for obvious reasons.

### Regional Sports Hub

Where green belt land is allocated for sport and recreation, as it is at Cophall, we believe it is essential that the quality of facilities is high so to maximise participation and the resulting benefits. The concept of a regional sports hub is a good one and we agree that Cophall is the obvious site for this hub with the Borough.

The current changing facilities at Cophall are no longer fit for purpose and the Main Activity Hub proposed not only aims to replace these with state of the art changing and club facilities but to also provide an array of facilities that will attract visitors and increase informal participation. When looking at other successful and popular parks and open spaces the provision of facilities for play, skate areas, climbing walls and cafés are prominent. These facilities drive footfall and bring families into parks which is essential for sustainability. From a design perspective we feel it is important that consideration is given to the architecture of some of the newer buildings on the



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site (Allianz Park East Stand and proposed West Stand and Leisure Centre) and that the Main Activity Hub complements these buildings.

The restructure reconfiguration of the existing playing fields is welcomed and the proposed provision of new 3G playing pitches for rugby and football is supported. We have seen at Allianz Park the significant increases in participation that can be achieved through the provision of 3G properly managed and maintained artificial pitches. If we have a concern it is that the Masterplan lacks detail as to how the proposed pitches and the proposed new facilities will be funded and managed and this will be crucial to the success of the plan.

We also feel it is important to highlight that with the provision of new grass pitches and 3G pitches considerable land forming and drainage will be required which is not referenced or detailed. Although additional drainage has been installed at Cophall in recent years, further improvements will be required to improve the quality of the grass pitches – certainly if increased participation is to be achieved. We feel it is also important to secure large anchor football and rugby clubs as a base for this increased participation. This is likely to be relatively easy to achieve for football as there some large local youth clubs looking for a permanent home, but less easy for rugby. Both Mill Hill Rugby Club and Hendon Rugby Club currently run up to two senior teams but no mini or junior rugby. To create a thriving amateur rugby scene at Cophall we feel it would be desirable to have mini and junior on the site. Saracens would be keen to work with both local rugby clubs and the RFU to develop a plan to deliver this in the years ahead.

We note that regarding sporting activity and visitors to the Cophall site there is little mention of athletics and with two strong athletics clubs on the site this must be highlighted as an oversight.

#### Transport and connectivity

As outlined in the Masterplan Cophall currently suffers from several accessibility issues, including a lack of direct access by public transport (buses specifically), inadequate vehicular access and exits to the site, poor connectivity infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists and a lack of signage. The delivery of effective solutions to these issues will ultimately determine the feasibility and potential success of the Masterplan.

The widening of the Champions Way entry and provision of a slip road off the A1 into the Cophall site makes sense at a basic level, as does the improvements to the mini-roundabout. However, there is no evidence to indicate that a comprehensive assessment of the proposed changes to vehicular flow around the site and the potential impacts of the proposed developments on the surrounding areas has been carried out. Furthermore, the implementation of the Masterplan would also require changes to the current Saracens Travel Plan and so we feel a detailed assessment of these proposed changes would be required for the plan to progress. We would also expect that the robust travel planning requirements and focus on limiting vehicular access to the site imposed on Saracens as part of the Allianz Park developed would be replicated for all other future development on the site.



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The importance of delivering a new regular bus service into Cophall cannot be understated. If the aspirations to increase participation on the site are to be achieved, within the restrictions of limiting car use into the site, then a regular bus service through the site is essential.

Despite the focus above to manage vehicular access in line with the principles applied to Allianz Park, we do not feel that the proposed additional 135-150 underground car park spaces will be adequate. As part of the travel planning process outlined above an assessment of existing and proposed on-site car parking and control will be required so that an appropriate balance can be achieved across the site. Part of the area identified as area 4 in the plan (proposed meadow and BMX track) is currently used for parking and it should be considered whether this surface can be enhanced to provide additional parking capacity. Saracens are also concerned that on page 51 the plan shows a blue hashed area in front of Allianz Park for 'event day parking'. Saracens have made it clear in our West Stand plans that we do not intend to use this area for event day parking and would not like it used for this in the future.

The desired connectivity between the separate sites is positive although we suspect in some circumstances challenging to fully achieve. We believe it is very important that the link between Cophall and Sunny Hill Park is enhanced for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly to support students who will be moving between Cophall and Middlesex University's Hendon Campus.

#### Supporting nature conservation and biodiversity

Saracens are very supportive of improving biodiversity and nature conservation and are confident that this can be achieved alongside improving sports facilities and increasing participation. In fact, this is something Saracens have been able to achieve successfully at Allianz Park and there are other larger scale examples of where this has been achieved, such as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The areas proposed for wetlands, meadow loop track, forest activity area and woodlands play trail have the potential to enhance the biodiversity on the site and provide informal recreational areas for local people to enjoy as walking or running routes.

The above notes cover the main areas and issues which Saracens want to highlight at this point and we want to reiterate our continuing commitment to support the Masterplan process as it progresses.