

DM.25.1185 Proposal Temporary (36 months) permission for change of use of existing tennis courts to padel courts and associated works.

**St Francis Sports and Social Club, Colwell Road, Haywards Heath. West Sussex.
RH16 4EZ**

This application looks to provide three padel tennis courts in an area close to residential properties at Southdowns Park, Buckle Lane and Bowden Lane and adjacent to the communal gardens and associated bandstands used by residents of Southdowns Park.

I have visited this area several times and found it to be relatively tranquil despite being located next to sporting facilities, and I am concerned that if permission is granted for this development this will have an impact on the amenity of residents, particularly those living in the Southdowns Park apartments looking out onto the proposed courts. I appreciate that other sports are played in this area, bowls for example which creates little disturbance, and football where noise is typically created by players, spectators, coaches and referees. It is understood that football matches in this area, played on pitches closer to the A272, take place during the football season on Wednesday evenings (18.00 to 22.00) and during the day on Saturdays and Sundays (09.00 to 15:00), with training taking place during the evening Monday to Thursday (18.00 to 22.00). In contrast it is proposed that padel will be played between 07.00 and 22.00, seven days per week.

The applicant seeks to replace the two tennis courts in this location with three padel courts. In the acoustic report it is argued that the noise levels generated by padel will not be dissimilar to noise that would be produced if the tennis courts were brought back into use. It should be noted that the tennis courts are not provided with flood lighting and could not therefore be used as extensively as the proposed padel courts. In addition, various sources agree that the acoustic character of padel is notably different to that of tennis. This view was upheld in a planning appeal decision dated 10 June 2025, Appeal Ref: APP/X1735/W/25/3359465, concerning an application to replace tennis courts with padel courts. The inspector concluded that the contained nature of the smaller padel courts would result in more frequent ball strikes during games which, together with noise from balls rebounding off the glass enclosure would give rise to greater noise than that produced by playing tennis.

It should also be noted that this application seeks permission to provide seating around the padel courts for spectators together with a “dwell area” where it is proposed that up to 12 individuals will be able to sit and socialise. Although the report states that “background music is not proposed at this stage” this cannot be ruled out in the future. It is not possible to accurately predict noise that might be produced by use of this area. The applicants have stated that noise from spectators and players will be controlled through measures outlined in the Noise Management Plan (NMP) submitted however, in my experience NMPs are of limited value when trying to control noise from recreational activities. A better way to limit the impact of noise from this type of facility would be to restrict the hours of operation and/or to provide mitigation such as acoustic barriers. These measures were discussed with the acoustic consultant, but they have not been addressed in the acoustic report submitted.

While I acknowledge that there is currently no specific guidance for assessing noise from padel, I do not consider BS 8233, Approved Document O or the Sport England Design Guidance Note (Artificial Grass Pitches – Acoustic, Planning Implications, 2015) to be appropriate for this type of assessment.

BS 8233 gives acceptable day time levels in terms of LAeq for habitable rooms and outside amenity areas and therefore addresses general, steady-state environmental noise such as that from traffic or anonymous background sound rather than the distinctive, impulsive and intermittent noise generated by padel.

It has been questioned in the acoustic report whether the communal gardens serving Southdowns Park can be considered as an amenity space as use by residents has not been noticed during monitoring. I have noticed people in the gardens, and the presence of garden furniture here suggests that residents like to sit in their outside space. The gardens are a shared amenity space for residents, and they have a reasonable expectation to use this area for relaxation and outdoor activities. Regardless of how frequently they were occupied during visits, this space should be considered sensitive to noise.

The LAmax levels referred to in both BS 8233 and Document O relate to nighttime noise thresholds that should not be exceeded more than 10 times per night. There is no equivalent guidance for daytime LAmax levels, and I am concerned that frequent, repeated impact sounds, potentially many thousands throughout the day, will affect residential amenity, both indoors and in the garden spaces.

The Sport England guidance focuses mainly on noise from voices during team sports such as football, rugby and hockey. Although it briefly mentions impact noise from hockey, it advises that such noise should be addressed separately through mitigation, which further demonstrates that this guidance is not designed to assess the unique characteristics of padel noise. This issue was addressed in the recent planning appeal decision, with the inspector noting the differences in noise produced by the different sports and questioning the value of the Sport England guidance when assessing noise from padel.

Even if the Sport England guidance could be taken into consideration it should be noted that the acoustic report identifies periods of time during the morning and late evening when noise from padel, evident in the outside area at Southdown Park, will not meet the criteria specified. Limited data was provided in the report, with full information for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday but with no data for Saturday and Sunday, Friday afternoon/evening and Monday morning. In addition, the report mentions that there will be some early morning and late evening periods when predicted LAmax levels at Southdown Park and Bowden Way will be above current site levels (although there is no mention of LAmax criteria in the Sport England guidance, only LAeq levels). Again, limited data has been provided.

I feel it is significant that Acoustic South East has decided not to carry out a BS4142 assessment, stating that this guidance is not meant for assessing the impact of noise from recreational activities, but has used other guidance such as BS8233 and the overheating standard, Approved Document O, which are also not appropriate to be used in this situation. Technical Note for BS 4142:2014+A1:2019 produced by the Association of Noise Consultants gives the view that noise from 'recreational activities' can be assessed using

BS4142 if the sound is 'broadly commercial'. This document also states that: *an assessment made using BS4142 could form a useful component of a nuisance assessment and, although not designed for this purpose should not therefore be discounted entirely.*

Given the above, on 20 November 2025 at 11:00, I carried out an indicative one-hour background measurement on site, which recorded a background level of 37dB LA90. This was a short-term reading and does not constitute a full assessment however, the relatively low background level recorded, even in the middle of the day, suggests that noise from padel, once corrections for impulsivity and intermittency are applied, could result in an adverse, and potentially significant adverse, impact on nearby residents. A full BS4142 assessment is essential to confirm this and to ensure that the likely effects on amenity are properly understood. It is therefore recommended that the applicant undertakes a comprehensive BS4142 assessment, as this is the most appropriate method for evaluating the impact of noise from commercial sport.

National planning guidance states that decisions should ensure that a development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects on health and living conditions and that adverse impact resulting from noise should be mitigated and reduced to a minimum. Impact sounds from bats hitting balls, from balls striking perimeter screens and vocal noise from players and spectators are likely to affect how residents use their gardens and may result in them having to close their windows. This was discussed with the acoustic consultant who agreed to include acoustic barriers when modelling the likely noise impact of the development however, barriers are not mentioned in the acoustic report. I accept that a barrier may be of limited use due to the topography of the site however, without accurate information, I am unable to make a judgement. It should also be noted that a barrier may not be desirable here given the Conservation Officers comments.

The possibility of reducing the impact of noise through reduced hours of operation of the club was also discussed, however the applicants have not made amendments and still seek to operate between 07.00 and 22.00 (15 hours a day) 7 days per week.

Conclusion:

Padel is a fast-growing sport enjoyed by many, but it has attracted recent media attention due to disturbance caused to nearby residents, and controversy when planning permission has been sought in sensitive locations.

There are several padel courts available in the Mid Sussex area which have not generated noise complaints to date as they have either been provided with suitable acoustic barriers, contained within a building or are located well away from residential property.

The acoustic report submitted with this application has concluded that the development will not have an impact on residents however, the data reported is limited, and in my opinion the guidance used is not strictly appropriate.

My analysis of the information provided, and assessment of noise generated by padel during visits to courts at the Triangle leisure centre in Burgess Hill and at Smash Padel next to the rugby club in Cuckfield suggests that if this development proceeds as planned there will be

an adverse impact on local residents, possibly a significant adverse impact. Sound from padel will be audible inside properties and, although not particularly loud, the frequent, repetitive and impulsive nature of the sound produced over a 15 hour period, 7 days a week, may mean that residents are forced to close their windows. In the communal gardens serving Southdowns Park, the constant sound of bat on ball, together with noise from players and spectators will be more apparent, and residents may be restricted in how they use their outside space.

Without more acoustic information regarding the site such as a representative background level using the LA90 metric and a full BS4142 assessment, I cannot give a more precise prediction of the likely impact. The planning officer may wish to consider whether this development is necessary or desirable given the potential impact on people living nearby when making their decision.

At this stage I still feel that there is insufficient information on which to make informed comments.

20 November 2025

Jane Cooper

Senior Environmental Health Officer