

# Gardens row puts plans in spotlight

By Paul Dale

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A move to construct floodlighting at the world's oldest lawn tennis club has landed two of Birmingham's most venerable institutions in an unlikely planning dispute.

Members of the Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Society are likely to be refused permission to illuminate four courts because the 25ft high columns would spoil views of the nearby Botanical Gardens – even though the lights would be switched off at 9pm.

City council planning officials are warning that strict

detract from the Botanical Gardens, he explained.

Mr Holland said: "We don't see this as being obtrusive. I don't think it would spoil the view that much.

"Whose view is it anyway? We are where we are."

Edgbaston city councillor Deirdre Alden urged the committee to give planning permission.

Coun Alden (Con) said: "The lights would be on at night and I can't see that would spoil people's enjoyment of the Botanical Gardens. We are talking about the world's oldest tennis club, something Birmingham should be proud of and support.

"It's only tennis courts, for heaven's sake. There's nothing anti-social about it. It's not as if there would be massive crowds and lots of noise."

The club won planning permission for lighting columns in May 1997, but failed to proceed with the scheme. Permission lapsed three years ago, forcing Mr Holland to submit a fresh application.

In the meantime the council had strengthened its conservation policy and drawn up tougher restrictions on development in Edgbaston.

Mr Holland said: "We had planning permission but, in common with most tennis clubs, our management team is voluntary and elected at the AGM each year. The problem is that certain things flip, one of which was renewing permission for the floodlights."

Council planning officer Stephanie Hawkins, in a written report to the development control committee, pointed out that a character appraisal for the Edgbaston Conservation Area made special reference to the importance of public views.

She said: "The appraisal identifies that public views within the conservation area heighten and sustain its characteristic air of exclusivity."

Ms Hawkins said: "The issue in this case is not that the views will be obstructed by development, but that the introduction of further tall floodlighting columns would appear incongruous in the skyline, adversely affecting the open rural outlook."

Modern lawn tennis was invented at the Westbourne Road ground in the early 1860s by Major T H Gem and J B A Perera, making the Edgbaston venue the oldest surviving tennis club in the world.



The Botanical Gardens

restrictions on development must apply because the tennis club, founded in 1860, and the Botanical Gardens, opened in 1832, are in the Edgbaston Conservation Area.

The development control committee, which is due to consider the club's application next week, is being recommended to preserve the "exclusivity" of the conservation area by refusing planning permission.

One of the objectors to the scheme, the Garden History Society, said it was concerned by the potential adverse impact of bright lighting on the Botanical Gardens and the Westbourne Road Leisure Gardens.

But Bob Holland, secretary of the Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Society, said he couldn't understand the objection to his application for 17 floodlighting columns.

Courts on the northern part of the Westbourne Road site were already lit at night and did not

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