

PLANNING STATEMENT

OUTDOOR AND INDOOR ARCHERY FACILITY

LAND AT ASHWORTH VALLEY SCOUT CAMPSITE,
ASHWORTH ROAD, ROCHDALE, OL11 5UP

APPLICANT – ROCHDALE COMPANY OF ARCHERS LTD &
ASHWORTH VALLEY SCOUT CAMPSITE



Ashworth Valley
Scout Campsite



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Executive Summary

The Rochdale Company of Archers was formed in 1954 and provides recreational and competitive shooting for a wide spectrum of Archers, of all ages, physical abilities and backgrounds, and has received recognition from National Sporting Organisations for inclusivity, the facilities provided, and the range of activities offered to its membership. The Club has an active and growing junior membership, with squad members competing at Regional and National level.

The Archery Club's current and long-standing Leasehold and Tenancy arrangement will expire in 2025. The lease is with the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club, at Moorgate Avenue, Bamford, Rochdale. The Rugby Club have indicated that the current Tenancy and Licence will not be renewed, nor will a replacement arrangement be offered. The reason for this is that the Rugby Club wishes to improve its own sporting offer. Rochdale Company of Archers will lose both its indoor and outdoor ranges, the associated facilities, and without any replacement provision the club is facing a very uncertain future.

A replacement facility is therefore needed before 2025. The club wishes to remain within the Rochdale Borough and a site close to its existing base will allow it to retain membership. By the very nature of the sport, the provision of facilities demands a considerable area of open and isolated land, where the activity can be carried out in a safe and controlled environment. To allow for the provision of the facilities which enable the sport to be enjoyed throughout the year, and in all weather conditions, the site should also be able to accommodate a Club facility including an indoor shooting range.

A site has been purchased at the local Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite. The northernmost part of the site comprises an existing compound that is enclosed by existing mature trees and bushes to the site boundaries. This land is previously developed and was formerly occupied by a building that was used by the Scouting organisation for the training of Scout Leaders. The southernmost part of the application site comprises agricultural fields and is more open in character.

The southern area of land is to be retained as grassed fields and will provide the outdoor archery shooting range. The screened previously developed northern area, is to house the indoor shooting range, other essential facilities to support the outdoor sporting use of the site, and the parking area.

The application site is wholly within the ownership of the newly established Ashworth Archery Trust, having been acquired in 2023 from the Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite who are joint applicants. The Rochdale Company of Archers and the Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite are joint beneficiaries of the Charitable aims of the Ashworth Archery Trust, which exists to promote both the interests of Archery in the Borough of Rochdale and to enhance the provision of Scouting activities.

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The Scout Campsite already offer a range of indoor and outdoor activities to visiting scouts. The development will significantly improve the offer that can be provided to Scouts wishing to take part in Archery. The synergies go beyond simply the provision of facilities. Training will be provided to Scout activity leaders and the Rochdale Company of Archers will gain the potential to recruit and enthuse the next generation of Archers.

There is extensive Planning Policy support for development that provides either improved sporting opportunities, or maintain those that exist, within Adopted and Emerging Development Plan policies and the NPPF. Policies C6 and C8 from the Core Strategy and LT/1, LT/9 and G/5 from the 2006 UDP are also relevant.

The site is located within the Green Belt. The use of the land for an outdoor sporting use within the Green Belt is entirely consistent with Paragraph 155 of the NPPF, Core Strategy Policy G4 (Protecting Green Belt Land), the 2006 UDP policy D4 (Control of Development in the Green Belt), and the Greater Manchester "Places For Everyone" Joint Development Plan (Spatial Framework) JP-G 10 (Green Belt).

The indoor archery shooting range is very much an integral part of the overall outdoor sport of Archery. The indoor range allows the club to successfully continue on a year-round basis, during adverse weather conditions, particularly during the winter period. Such a facility is important to help members to continue to develop their sporting skills and ensure that the club is able to offer sporting activity at all times of the year. The indoor range is an essential facility for the overall use of the site for outdoor sport and compliance is achieved with paragraph 154 of the NPPF that explains that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is acceptable where the facility is required in connection with a change of use of land to outdoor sport and recreation.

Due to the existing screening provided by the chosen site there is no unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the local area or the openness of the Green Belt. No adverse neighbour impacts will arise as archery is not a noisy or intrusive activity. There are no known unacceptable impacts with respect to all other planning considerations.

Letters of support for the development are provided by the sport's governing body (Archery GB), the Lancashire Archery Association, and Northern Counties Archery Association.

In conclusion, the sporting and societal benefits from this joint proposal from Rochdale Company of Archers and Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite are considerable and are an important consideration in the assessment of the application. The development proposals accord with both local and national planning policy and planning permission should be permitted for the proposed development.

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1. Summary of Application

The Application seeks Planning Consent for the establishment and construction of an Outdoor and Indoor Archery facility upon land at Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite, Ashworth Road, Rochdale, OL11 5UP, consisting of an Outdoor Shooting Area, and Indoor Club facilities, including shooting area, workroom, target storage, kitchen and toilet facilities.

The development proposal has been brought about as Rochdale Company of Archer's tenancy at Rochdale Rugby Union Club, of some fifty years standing, will expire imminently. The Landlords, The Trustees of the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club, have indicated that the current Tenancy and Licence will not be renewed, nor will a replacement arrangement be offered. It is understood that Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club are looking to improve their own sporting facilities and will therefore no longer be able to accommodate the indoor archery facilities at their site and the ongoing use of the outdoor pitches by the Archery Club will be terminated.

This development will therefore provide essential replacement facilities for the Archery Club to continue to offer sporting facilities for its members. Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite are joint applicants and will also benefit from the proposals. The Scout Campsite already offers a range of indoor and outdoor activities to visiting scout groups that camp at Ashworth Valley or stay in the other accommodation that the site offers. The development will significantly improve the offer that can be provided to Scouts wishing to take part in Archery. The synergies go beyond simply the provision of facilities. For example, members of Rochdale Company of Archers will be able to provide training and accreditation to Scout activity leaders.

Rochdale Company of Archers are keen to support the next generation of Archers in the Rochdale Borough, and this proposed link between the organisations will help to achieve this sporting ambition and provide a source of new Club members who wish to adopt the sport of Archery. Letters of support for the development are provided by the sport's governing body (Archery GB) and the Lancashire Archery Association (see Appendix G).

The Pennine Region of the Scouting Association, of which Rochdale and Heywood are a part, is comprised of 21 Scout Groups, offering scouting activities to 1,100 young people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. The Rochdale Company of Archers intend to engage with these Scout Groups and offer ongoing activities throughout the year.

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2. Rochdale Company of Archers - Background and History

2.1 History

The Rochdale Company of Archers is one of the longest established sports clubs within the Rochdale Borough.

The Club was formed in 1954, and was initially sited upon land at Halfway, Wardle, Rochdale, utilising land and a former single storey building to provide both outdoor and indoor shooting for members.

Since the 1970's the Club has shared a location at Moorgate Avenue, Bamford, Rochdale with the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club.

The Club draws its membership from the wider region of North Manchester, being one of only two Archery Clubs in the vicinity, attracting competitive archers from Rochdale, Heywood, Bury, Bacup, Rossendale and Oldham, and hosts visiting archers from wider regions.

The Club has achieved success in all the wider disciplines of the sport of Archery.

2.2 Archery Club Membership

The Club provides recreational and competitive shooting for a wide spectrum of Archers, of all ages and backgrounds, and has received recognition from National Sporting Organisations for inclusivity, the facilities provided, and the range of activities offered to its membership. The Club has an active and growing junior membership, with squad members competing at Regional and National level.

The current shooting range and Club facilities have been designed to allow access for archers with disabilities, who use the sport as recreation and as an ongoing part of therapy. Junior archers are offered a structured programme to competitive archery and a targeted programme of activities to help them achieve their potential within the sport.

2.3 Accreditation and Awards

The Rochdale Company of Archers is a Club affiliated to the National Governing Body of Archery GB, and organises events under their overall jurisdiction, hosting events qualifying for National and World Archery Record status recognition. The Club is also affiliated to the Northern Counties Archery Society and to the Lancashire Archery Society, and hosts events for these Organisations and provides training for County squad members.

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Local recognition for Sporting Excellence has been received by success in the “Club of the Year” category within the Greater Manchester Sports Awards, winning the “On Target Partnership Award” under the Archery GB Club Development Programme. The Club were elected winners of the “Club of the Year” awards under the Awards programme run by Rochdale Borough and their Sports Development partners, “Link4Life”, achieving Rochdale’s premier sports standard “Springboard Gold” in 2010.

The Club has a substantial number of Archery GB Accredited Coaches and Instructors, who offer training for competitive archers, taster sessions and “Have A Go” sessions for beginners and mentoring for developing talent.

3. Current Shooting Ground and Range Facilities

The Archery Club's long-standing Leasehold and Tenancy arrangement, which secures their current facilities, will expire in 2025. The lease is with the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club, at Moorgate Avenue, Bamford, Rochdale, and is where the current Indoor Range and Outdoor Shooting Areas are located. Initially, and until 1995, the Company of Archers had a prefabricated Indoor Range and Clubhouse attached to the Rugby Club Clubhouse and shared the car parking areas. Members of the Archery Club were also social members of the Rugby Club and shared the catering and toilet facilities.

Upon rebuilding of the Rugby Club in 1995, the Archers built a new, more substantial brick-built range, again attached to the main Rugby Clubhouse, which they continued to occupy until 2004, when, upon realising the proceeds of a land sale, the Rochdale Rugby Club again relocated within the site at Moorgate.

The Archery Club surrendered their former lease upon their Range and Clubhouse, and moved into a new purpose-built facility, the current Range, again attached to the Rugby Clubhouse.

The Rugby field playing surface allows the Club to shoot at the longest recognised distance of 100 yards, as a standard when shooting the "York" outdoor "round", the traditional and Grand National Archery Society (GNAS)/Archery GB recognised competitive round for adult archers.

The Indoor range is 30m long, to allow for the shooting of the "rounds" recognised by the same accrediting bodies for Indoor competition. Photographs of that existing shooting facility are included as an Appendix to this report.

Both the Outdoor and Indoor range facilities are registered with Archery GB as authorised shooting ranges for competitions.

The occupation of these facilities is secured by a formal Tenancy/Lease, the parties to the Lease being "The Trustees of Rochdale R.U.F.C." and "Trustees of the Rochdale Company of Archers".

The Agreement extends for the Term of Twenty years, commencing 3rd August 2005, and secures the occupation of the Indoor Range, together with the "right and liberty to use of the Lessors land and grounds at Broadhalgh Avenue, Rochdale, subject to the right of the Lessors to refuse such an allowance" in the event of a clash between an organised rugby fixture and the archer's intention to shoot upon the land.

This arrangement has sufficed for many years, as the traditional Rugby playing season extends through the Autumn and Winter months, and the Archery shooting calendar commences after the termination of the Rugby season and concludes in the Autumn.

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The Tenancy of the Archery Indoor Range and the Licence for the use of the fields do not contain a “Right to Renew”.

The term of both the Tenancy and the Licence will expire upon the 3rd August 2025. The Landlords, The Trustees of the Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club have indicated that the current Tenancy and Licence will not be renewed, nor will a replacement arrangement be offered. The reason for this is that the Rugby Club wishes to improve its own sporting offer (see ‘Club Development’ below).

In summary, within the next 2 years Rochdale Company of Archers will lose both its indoor and outdoor ranges, the associated facilities, and without any replacement provision the club is facing a very uncertain future.

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4. Rochdale Company of Archers and Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club Development

The Governing Bodies of both the sports of Archery and Rugby Union Football are actively seeking to expand the offer and provision of their respective sporting facilities on a National, Regional and Local basis, and have Development Programmes in place to assist in achieving this aim.

The ambition of both National Governing Organisations is to expand the sports to embrace the provision of Women's sport, to enhance the availability of opportunity to Minority Communities, and to promote their offer of Junior Sport, by expanding their facilities and opportunities.

The Rochdale Rugby Union Club intends to use the current archery range, upon the expiration of the current Tenancy, to develop their Clubhouse facilities to provide Women's and Junior changing rooms, and a Gym facility. The intentions of the Rugby Club are completely understandable and will further the sporting provision for Rugby in the local area but are obviously detrimental to the provision of archery sporting facilities.

The "Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy 2016 – 2026" identifies and recognises that the sports facilities for Rugby at Moorgate Avenue are "over played" and recommends that the facilities and playing areas be improved. It also states that "further capacity would be required to meet future demand".

The Playing Pitch Strategy also highlights that, within the Rochdale Borough, there are twenty-nine Rugby Union teams over all age groups, but only one women's team and three girls' teams. The pressure upon the current Rugby pitches is noted, and measures are recommended by the strategy to enhance availability for training and match purposes. Unfortunately for the Archery Club, not renewing their lease to use sports pitches as outdoor shooting ranges releases the availability of sports pitches for rugby and will assist in this objective.

Equally, the Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy, at Part 4, notes the recommendation to:

"Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs, through a range of solutions and partnership agreements".

The Strategy does not address the provision of facilities for the sport of Archery directly, but it is obvious that the intention of the Council is to support the provision of accessible opportunities for sporting participation, through the encouragement of the development of high-quality facilities and Clubs that promote excellence.

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5. Site Requirements

The current use of the Outdoor and Indoor Archery shooting facilities is anticipated to end at the current Moorgate Avenue site in 2025, upon the expiration of the current Tenancy and Licence. At this time, the access to the Indoor Range will cease, and, through pressure upon the playing fields at Moorgate, the ability to shoot outdoors will be curtailed.

The Archery Club have been aware of the intentions of the Rugby Club in this matter for a time and have been considering options to relocate to a facility that will allow the current activities to continue, and to provide for future expansion of the offer to its current and future membership.

By the very nature of the sport, the provision of facilities demands a considerable area of open and isolated land, where the activity can be carried out in a safe and controlled environment. To allow for the provision of the facilities which enable the sport to be enjoyed throughout the year, and in all weather conditions, the site should also be able to accommodate a Club facility including an indoor shooting range.

Rochdale Council, within its Playing Pitch Strategy, has identified that there is already a worrying shortage within the Borough of areas of this nature, so the Archery Club has put its efforts into identifying areas of land, which are both available and affordable, and have the potential to host the Club and its requirements.

By their nature, areas of this type are located within the Countryside, away from built up and developed areas, and free from potential uses to which shooting activities may pose a hazard. Most, if not all, of the areas identified within the Rochdale Borough boundaries, and in neighbouring Boroughs, are currently utilised for agricultural purposes, either for the grazing of livestock or the making of forage crops, or for equine purposes.

However, a site has been identified, the Application Site, which was not advertised as being for sale on the open market, but which was made available at an affordable price given that the end use for Archery aligned with the aims and intentions of the Scouting Association. The former landowner (Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite) supports this proposal and can see exciting synergies that would allow both the Archery Club and the Scouting Organisation to develop and extend their offer to the community.

6. Site Selection

6.1 General Constraints

The Rochdale Company of Archers are, as the name suggests, a Club based in Rochdale, with the majority of the membership residing within the Borough. Therefore, the search for an alternative facility had been primarily looking at sites within Rochdale, preferably as close as possible to the current facilities, to allow for the retention of the membership core.

The shooting of arrows upon an Archery Range is an activity that needs an open space, remote from developed residential and industrial areas, preferably in open countryside, but in a location where the shooting area will not be adversely affected by wind or rain, and where the surface is level. As such, hillside locations are unsuitable, as are elevated and exposed upland land areas.

The Borough of Rochdale is primarily an Urban Town, with the sub-townships of Rochdale, Heywood, Middleton, Milnrow, Castleton and Littleborough dominating, with the lesser localities of Wardle, Norden and Bamford, Hopwood, Langley, Smithy Bridge, spaced between the principal towns. The open land between the various settlements forms the Green Belt.

The Borough of Rochdale is distinctly polarised in its Land Allocation. Open spaces are either within the defined Green Belt, and therefore subject to statutory protection, or outside the Green Belt, and subject to intense development pressure.

The desire of Landowners to seek to maximise the financial potential of land that falls outside or inside the Green Belt is evidenced by the sites put forward as potential development areas during the “Call for Development Sites” issued by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in 2015, extended for a further period of submission in 2016, ultimately becoming an integral part of the “Places For Everyone” spatial plan. The Landowners perception that sites represent a potential for Residential or Industrial Development, escalates the perceived value of any land that becomes available, including those which may represent a potential site for the Archery Club.

The Club do not have the financial resources to compete for land acquisition upon these sites, given the Owner’s expectation that they may achieve development potential, either imminently, or in the future.

The Archery Club have been actively investigating the potential for acquiring land, upon which to site the Clubhouse and the Ranges, by scrutiny of the advertisements upon the Internet “For Sale” listings, and by approaching Land Agencies which are usually used for the sale of such land, such as Richard Turner Associates, WBW Surveyors, PWC Associates, John Pallister Surveyors, as well as local Estate Agencies such as Adamson’s, Crossley’s, and others, who may offer small privately owned areas of land to the market.

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No alternative sites within the Rochdale Borough have become available upon the Market, that are suitable for Archery use, the small number of land areas coming to market being unsuitable by virtue of proximity to residential or industrial areas, or elevation or adverse topography.

A further factor that frustrates attempts to acquire suitable land, is that the open land areas around the Borough, which have not achieved an allocation for development under the GMSDF, are owned by Landowning Estates, such as Peel Estates, United Utilities, and the Trustees of the Earls of Wilton.

As such, the farmland is rented, under secure Agricultural Tenancies, to active farmers for the principal activities of Dairy and Livestock farming.

The land is then registered upon the Rural Land Registry with the Rural Payments Agency and is used to activate qualifying entitlements under the DEFRA Farm Basic Payment Scheme and, more latterly, included within schemes under the emerging Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI).

Farms have been acquiring land to extend their operations, to take advantage of the economies of scale, and farmland which has become available due to the retirement or death of Tenant Occupiers.

The very few farms in private ownership that appear upon the market are invariably marketed as a unit, including a Farmhouse and associated buildings, and command prices way beyond the resources of a sporting Club.

The Club has made approaches to farm owners, who are not actively selling their property, to enquire towards the potential of the release for sale of a limited area of land upon which to site the Archery Range, but without success.

Either holdings are being actively worked as productive farms, or alternatively, are considered to hold future development potential, and therefore, are being retained. Equally, the treatment of the proceeds to the Landowner of a sale, under the Taxation regime, render the sale unattractive, when sold for non-agricultural purposes.

6.2 Land at Bury & Rochdale Old Road, Heywood

Prior to the submission of this current application the Archery Club believed it had identified an alternative suitable site. An application was made to Rochdale Borough Council for a new archery facility on land to the north of Bury and Rochdale Old Lane (Planning Ref.20/00784/FUL). That application was however withdrawn prior to determination.

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The Archery Club had reached an agreement to purchase the land from the landowner, but understandably the club wanted to secure planning permission prior to completing the purchase. The application received objections from local residents who did not wish the development to proceed. Unfortunately, the Archery Club was advised that it could no longer purchase the land as another higher offer had been accepted.

6.3 Dividing the Outdoor and Indoor Shooting locations

In their efforts to find suitable alternative accommodation, the Club have considered the possibility of dividing the activities of Outdoor and Indoor shooting by renting a building for Indoor Shooting and attempting to source a separate location for Outdoor Shooting.

Such a solution had however been discounted as unachievable. Commercial rentals for a building to be used as an indoor archery range would be unaffordable for a Club with circa 150 members. There would in all likelihood be rental reviews over the term of the lease and it would prove to be a significant continual expenditure on the club's limited resources derived from its' annual membership subscriptions. The additional costs for purchasing or leasing land for an outdoor range also needs to be taken into consideration. Significant upfront establishment costs would be required for both establishing an outdoor range, providing the essential built facilities to support that outdoor range, and to make a separate building suitable for an indoor archery use. In summary the upfront costs would consume all of the Archery Club's financial resources to establish separate indoor and outdoor range and subsequently there would be continual ongoing lease expenditure that would significantly damage the club's ability to remain on a sound financial footing in the future.

Further, if the Club were to be required to operate on two separate sites ongoing operational costs would be significant. The amount of equipment required would significantly increase (such as targets and stands, facilities for the storage of targets, target stands, trailers and equipment to set out a field upon shooting days) and the costs of providing and maintaining two sets of amenities for club members would also be prohibitive (e.g., car parking, toilet facilities, changing facilities, workshop facilities for repairing and maintaining archery equipment, and basic kitchen facilities).

The reality is that splitting the operations is not financially achievable for the club. As there are no alternative Archery Clubs within the Rochdale Borough members would be likely to decide to travel to alternative Clubs, in the North West Region, thereby causing the Rochdale Company of Archers to close, depriving the Borough of a Sporting Facility.

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6.4 The Selected Site

The selected site was formerly within the ownership of Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite. The northernmost part of the site comprises an area of land (referred to as “the Compound”) with a crushed aggregate surface, approximately 90m x 40m. The land is previously developed and was formerly occupied by a building and car parking area that was used by the Scouting organisation for the training of Scout Leaders. The building has now been demolished and it is understood the demolished building forms part of the crushed stone surface on the land. The land is enclosed by existing boundary trees. The utility services for water and electricity are still in situ. Included at Appendix A are photographs that illustrate this former use.

Upon this land the parking area to serve the development and the new indoor archery range building and associated facilities are proposed. The site is considered to be ideal for the intended purpose as it is previously developed and screened by mature trees and bushes that will hide the proposed building from public view. This land was owned by Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite and rented on a temporary basis to a local farmer.

The southernmost part of the application site is more open in character and comprises agricultural fields. It has a level area over which to shoot. It formed part of the generous grounds to the scout campsite and was sometimes used for organised activities. The Scout campsite initially intended to establish an Archery Range, but were unable to do so due to financial constraints (see Planning Ref. 01/D39463 included at Appendix B). The land was used intermittently for Archery purposes and signage warning persons of the usage of the land as a Range still exist on site. A local farmer currently takes the grass crop from the land on an informal basis.

On this land the outdoor archery range is to be provided and the site will be retained in its existing state as extensive grassland. Shooting would be undertaken from the south west to the north east. An arrow-proof boundary enclosure is required to the north eastern boundary of the site, but this need not be a tall structure since there is ample space on the site to avoid this being an issue.

The chosen site therefore offers excellent opportunities to secure replacement facilities for the Archery Club. The site is close to the existing club and therefore will help to ensure retention of the existing club membership and keeps the club within the Borough of Rochdale. Visual impacts of the new built development will be minimal given the site’s location on previously developed land that is enclosed by existing mature trees and bushes which form substantial screening. Finally, there are excellent opportunities for synergies between the Scouting organisation and the Archery Club to the mutual benefit of both organisations.

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7. Detail of the Proposed Development

Access to the site is from the north east via an existing track that joins Ashworth Road. Vehicle parking is to be provided on the northern part of the application site within that area that has been previously developed and is screened by existing trees. The proposed indoor range will also be located in this location.

The outdoor range will be located on land to the south. Other than the provision of a permeable hardcore path on the shooting line and a low arrow proof fence on the north eastern boundary, there are no physical works needed to accommodate the outdoor range. The path will allow wheelchair users to participate more easily. For safety reasons it is necessary to provide an arrow proof boundary fence on the north eastern boundary (the direction of shoot will always be from the south west to the north east). Due to the distance from the shooting line that fence need not be greater than 2 metres in height (further detail on this provided in the Site Safety Strategy submitted with the application). The remainder of the outdoor range will be retained as a grass field and mowed. When outdoor archery is not taking place, this field will continue to be a grass sown open field. The visual appearance will be unchanged.

With respect to the indoor range, the submitted plans show the extent of the proposals in detail. The design of the proposed building is similar in appearance and proportions to a typical agricultural building with very limited fenestration. The construction materials would also be typical to agricultural building design, in colours to be agreed with the Council, to mitigate any potential visual intrusion.

The size of the building would be (67 m in length and 14 m wide) and is commensurate with its intended use as an indoor shooting range, with internal rooms for equipment storage, workshop facilities, toilets, and a basic kitchen area. The specification of the building is such that it will allow the Club to continue to provide the activities that it currently offers, whilst allowing the accommodation of a growing Club Membership.

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8. Planning History

8.1 The Application Site

With respect to the current application site the Council's Public Access Planning Applications Database indicates that just one prior application has been made on the site (see Appendix C). An application for a Scout Training Complex was made under Planning Ref. 83/D15246. No further details on this application are provided on the database, but the application was presumably permitted and authorised the erection of the Scout Training Centre that previously occupied the northern part of the application site.

That Scout Training Centre was demolished sometime between 2000 and 2003 and the footprint of the previously built area was let to a local farmer for storage purposes. Much of the land has a hard surface, which it is understood is partly the 'footprint' of the demolished building, and partly crushed aggregate from the demolished building. Evidence of this former use is provided in the site photos included as Appendix A.

8.2 The wider Ashworth Valley Campsite

There are no other planning applications that directly relate to the application site. The Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite has however submitted numerous previous applications on the wider scout site for development that furthers its' purposes. Most significantly, the Scout group itself submitted an application for an archery range. Planning permission was granted on 12 December 2001 under Planning Ref. 01/D39462. A copy of that planning permission together with the location of where the development was to take place (as indicated by the Council's Planning Applications Database) is included at Appendix | B.

8.3 Previous application to secure a replacement facility for Rochdale Company of Archers

As explained in section 6.2 of this report, Rochdale Company of Archers has in the recent past sought to obtain planning permission for a replacement Archery facility on a different site within the Borough (Planning Ref. 20/00784/FUL). That application received a considerable number of objections from local residents who did not wish the development to proceed. Unfortunately, the Archery Club was advised that it could no longer purchase the land as another higher offer had been accepted by the vendors.

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9. Planning Policy

9.1 Planning Constraints

The Development Plan indicates the site is within the Borough's Green Belt. Listed Buildings are approximately 250 m from the site to the north east at Ashworth Fold. The Ashworth Fold area also comprises part of a designated Conservation Area. However, due to the distance and existing screening that will enclose the proposed building, there will be no impacts on the setting of listed buildings or the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

No part of the site is within an area that is identified as being at risk of Flooding by the Environment Agency Flood Risk maps.

The access track to the site that adjoins Ashworth Road is also a Public Right of Way (Heywood Public Footpath FP3). There are no other public rights of way in close proximity to the application site.

9.2 Local Planning Policy

Development Plan documents of relevance currently comprise: -

- The Core Strategy Adopted 2016.
- The 2006 Unitary Development Plan.

Whilst not yet finally adopted, 'Places for Everyone' is a strategic Development Plan Document prepared by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority for nine Councils (including Rochdale) within Greater Manchester. The document has reached an advanced stage of preparation, having already been subject to public examination by the Planning Inspectorate. Their recommended proposed modifications to the plan have been subject to further consultation and it is expected that the document will be finally adopted, and become part of the Development Plan, in the near future. Due to the advanced stage of preparation of this document, Places for Everyone is of significant relevance to the decision making process. Within the emerging Places for Everyone document, the application site remains within the Green Belt.

Additionally, Rochdale Borough Council is also preparing an Allocations Plan. This document will allocate sites for development (or protection, etc.) in accordance with the strategic policies set out in the Adopted Core Strategy. Progress on this document has stalled and a draft document was last subject to consultation in 2018 (according to the Council's website comments made in response to that consultation are apparently still being considered). However, the delay is not unsurprising given that the Allocations Plan's content will also be impacted upon by Places for Everyone, which is only now reaching finalisation and adoption.

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In summary, the Allocations Plan is only in draft and can only be given very limited weight in the decision making process (the draft itself being quite aged being approximately 5 years since production).

The relevant development plan policies are detailed below: -

Core Strategy Adopted 2016

Policy	Policy Aims
C6: Improving health and well being.	To improve health and wellbeing by a variety of means including: a) maintaining and enhancing the borough's biodiversity, natural environment, open spaces and outdoor sport and recreational areas to create a coherent network of green infrastructure that can help promote better health
C8: Improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities.	The objective of the policy is to support sporting facilities. The policy sets out a sequential approach to the location of such facilities. The policy identifies the Council will work with agencies, services and businesses responsible for providing facilities to ensure that the needs and demands of communities are met.
G4: Protecting Green Belt Land.	The policy explains that the Council will look to protect the Green Belt except for that development which is deemed not to be inappropriate or where very special circumstances can be met.
SO2: To create successful and healthy communities.	A strategic objective of the Council identified by this policy is to improve the general health and quality of people's lives through better access to health facilities and services, education, community and cultural facilities and open space.

Unitary Development Plan 2006

Policy	Policy Aims
D4: Control of Development in the Green Belt	The policy aims to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development. It identifies that appropriate development includes essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation and inappropriate development should only be allowed in very special circumstances.
LT/1: Sport, Leisure and Tourism.	The policy identifies that the Council will permit and promote sports facilities.

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Policy	Policy Aims
LT/9: Protection of Existing Built Sports and Recreational facilities.	LT/9 states that the redevelopment or change of use of sports and recreation facilities will not be permitted. The objective of this policy is to retain such facilities for the health, welfare, and enjoyment of the local community.
G/5: New provision of outdoor sports facilities.	Explains that the Council will permit proposals for formal outdoor sport that meets existing and future demand.

Places for Everyone – Modifications Version 2023

Policy	Policy Aims
JP-P7: Sport and recreation.	Aims to protect and enhance Sport and Recreation facilities for all ages. Objective 8 of the policy is 'Enabling the continued development of major sports facilities and events, which can further enhance Manchester's international sporting reputation.'
JP-G10 Green Belt	Explains that the beneficial use of the Green Belt will be enhanced where this can be achieved without harm to its openness, permanence or ability to serve its five purposes.

9.3 National Planning Policy

Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) advises that *'access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.'*

Paragraph 103 of the NPPF then goes on to explain that existing sports and recreational buildings and land should be protected.

Paragraphs 152 to 156 of the NPPF explain how proposals affecting Green Belts will be considered. Paragraph 155 explains that changes of use of land to an outdoor sport or recreation use is appropriate development in the Green Belt. Furthermore, paragraph 154 explains that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is acceptable where the facility is required in connection with a change of use of land to outdoor sport and recreation.

Development that is not specifically recognised as being acceptable within the Green Belt is 'inappropriate'. Paragraphs 152 and 153 explain that 'inappropriate' development will only be permitted where there are 'very special circumstances' to justify the proposal.

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9.4 Other Material Considerations

Whilst not planning policy documents Rochdale Borough Council has also produced the Rochdale Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Strategy 2019-2029 (Draft November 2019) and the Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy 2016-2026.

Neither strategy includes archery as an area of focus, but the objectives and benefits of providing and protecting sports facilities that are recognised by these strategies are equally applicable to this development proposal.

The 8 strategy recommendations of the Playing Pitch Strategy, and what the Council will seek to achieve, are highly applicable to the development proposal. Those recommendations comprise: -

Strategy Recommendations

- a) Protect sports facilities where there is a need to do so through local planning policy
- b) Secure tenure and access to sites for high quality, development minded clubs through a range of solutions and partnership agreements
- c) Maximise community use of outdoor sports facilities where there is a need to do so
- d) Improve pitch quality
- e) Adopt a tiered approach (hierarchy of provision) for the management and improvement of sites
- f) Work in partnership with stakeholders to secure funding
- g) Rectify quantitative shortfalls in the current pitch stock
- h) Identify opportunities to add to the overall pitch stock to accommodate both current and future demand

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10. Planning Assessment

10.1 The 'Appropriateness' of the development in the Green Belt

The proposal involves the change of use of land from agriculture to use in connection with the sport of archery. The use of the land for an outdoor archery field is an outdoor sporting use that is entirely consistent with Paragraph 155 of the NPPF. Furthermore, an archery field would be consistent with Core Strategy Policy G4 (Protecting Green Belt Land), the 2006 UDP policy D4 (Control of Development in the Green Belt), and the emerging Places for Everyone policy JP-G10 (Green Belt).

The development includes the re-instatement of an outdoor parking area to serve the archery use. That car park does not involve the construction of any buildings and therefore there is no resulting impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The carpark provided to serve the sporting use of the land for archery is in principle acceptable development in the Green Belt and is also in accordance with both adopted and emerging Development Plan policies and the NPPF.

The new building proposed is intended to be used for the following purposes: -

- a) Essential toilet / hygiene facilities to serve the Archery Club
- b) Simple kitchen facilities to provide refreshments for members.
- c) A workshop facility for members to use, where on site adjustments and repairs can be made to equipment.
- d) An indoor shooting range.

Bullet points a) to c) are all unquestionably essential facilities that need to be provided on site to support the outdoor sport (archery). Such development is acceptable in the Green Belt as it meets the NPPF requirements of being a facility required in connection with a change of use of land to outdoor sport and recreation. Compliance with other Development Plan policies is also met.

With respect to bullet point d), the indoor archery shooting range is very much part an integral part of this outdoor sport. The indoor range allows the club to successfully continue on a year-round basis, during adverse weather conditions, particularly during the winter period. Such a facility is important to help members to continue to develop their sporting skills and ensure that the club is able to offer sporting activity at all times of the year. The Rochdale Company of Archery provide a full annual calendar of competitive and recreational events for their members and, in the future, for the Scouts.

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In summary, the indoor range is very much an essential facility for the overall use of the site for outdoor sport and compliance is achieved with paragraph 154 of the NPPF that explains that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is acceptable where the facility is required in connection with a change of use of land to outdoor sport and recreation. The indoor range is therefore 'appropriate' development within the Green Belt that should be supported in principle.

10.2 Consideration of similar proposals by other local authorities

a) South Ribble Borough Council. Bowman of Pendle and Samlesbury

Planning permission has been granted for a new indoor archery range, together with associated essential facilities, within the Green Belt at Samlesbury, Lancashire. The building is approximately 'L' shaped and is 28.7 m in length and 16.5 m wide (at its widest point). The application process was undertaken in two parts, with planning permission first being secured for a building that was 19 m in length, before an additional 9.7 m approved by a subsequent planning application.

Under Planning Ref. 07/2004/1166, planning permission was granted on 3 February 2005 for the use of land as an archery field, for associated car parking and landscaping works, for an indoor archery range, and for the temporary siting of steel containers for the storage of equipment. The decision notice, plans, and officers report are not available to view on the Council's planning application database, but it is apparent that the application was approved from the summary information that is available.

Following variations to that original approval granted under planning Refs. 07/2006/1187/FUL and 07/2009/0640/VAR, consent was granted for an extension to the indoor archery range under 07/2013/0067. A copy of the decision notice, dated 14 March 2023, and the Officer's report is included at Appendix D.

In the assessment of the planning application, the planning officer identifies that the site is within the Green Belt, and that both Local Plan policy and the National Planning Policy Framework both presume against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The assessment goes on to acknowledge that new buildings in the Green Belt, that are essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, are acceptable. The report goes on to conclude that *'As the use of the proposed building is clearly associated with the archery club, development is considered to be acceptable in principle.'*

In summary, in the assessment of a similar proposal, South Ribble Borough Council accepted that the provision of an indoor archery range was appropriate development, that comprised essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, and granted planning permission.

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b) Chorley Borough Council. Chorley Bowman

Consent was granted by Chorley Borough Council for a new indoor archery range within the Green Belt. The proposed building was approximately 29.6 m long and 5.7 m wide. The permitted development also included an associated car park and vehicle access point. A copy of the decision notice granting approval, and the Committee Report for the application, are included at Appendix E

The new development replaced existing buildings on the site that were used for equipment storage, but there were no toilet facilities, facilities to make refreshments, or any opportunities for indoor archery. In the assessment of the application the planning officer recognised that with respect to Green Belt planning policy that *'the proposal is therefore considered to be appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.'*

After initially accepting that the development was in principle appropriate development in the Green Belt, the report's assessment reached the view that, because the new buildings were larger than what existed previously, that the development would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

However, consideration was then given to whether there were any 'very special circumstances' to justify the development. It was decided that there were very convincing reasons why the development should be permitted. The Committee report states that: -

'The material considerations put forward provide sufficient weight in favour of the proposal and in terms of the Framework in this case it is considered the social benefits outweigh the environmental dimension from Green Belt harm. Very special circumstances exist sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm that would be caused by reason of inappropriateness, harm to the openness of the Green Belt and harm from encroachment of the countryside. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable.'

In summary, whilst it was accepted that the development was in principle appropriate development in the Green Belt, it was decided that due to the impact on openness, the proposal must be considered to be inappropriate development. However, it was very firmly accepted in the Committee report that there were very special circumstances to justify the development in the Green Belt. Planning permission was therefore given.

c) Salford Council. Eccles Archery Club

Since its foundation in 1953, Eccles Archery Club has operated on land adjacent to Eccles Water Treatment Works. The land is not designated as Green Belt, but is protected through the Local Plan and NPPF for continued recreation / sporting use. A new indoor archery

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building, 40 m in length and 10 m wide, was permitted by the Council. A copy of the decision notice and officer report are included at Appendix F.

The assessment of the application recognised the sporting and recreational benefits of the proposal, that were considered to further the recreational use of the site, complying with planning policy requirements to protect the land for recreational purposes.

The Officer report stated that: -

'The proposal would provide an indoor archery range for the club allowing the more experienced archers to practice year-round, with the facility providing a base where shooting can take place at all the regulation indoor distances. The range will also be used to host competitions and social events centered around archery.'

'The principle of erecting an indoor archery range at the site is therefore deemed to be acceptable and in accordance with policy – it would improve the facilities at an existing recreation facility in line with saved UDP policies R1 and R2.'

In summary, the benefits that the development provided for furthering the provision of facilities for sport and recreation, were seen as an important consideration in the assessment of the application.

10.3 Very Special Circumstances

(only applicable if it were held that the development proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt).

Development that is not specifically recognised as being acceptable within the Green Belt is considered to be 'inappropriate'. Paragraphs 152 and 153 explain that 'inappropriate' development will only be permitted where there are 'very special circumstances' to justify the proposal. For the reasons set out above the applicants contend that the proposed indoor archery range would constitute 'appropriate' development in the Green Belt, and it is not necessary to consider whether there are 'very special circumstances'. However, should it transpire that this is not the view of the Council, there are in any event 'very special circumstances' that justify the development.

Those very special circumstances reasons are explained in detail in the preceding pages of this report, which explains the importance of club to the area, its positive sporting benefits, how synergies with the Scouting organisation will be achieved, and details of how the applicants wish to develop in the future. Detailed support for the provision of improved sporting facilities is outlined in Development Plan policies, National Planning Policy documents, and the Council's Sporting Strategy documents.

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In summary, the following would comprise the very special circumstances why the shooting range should be permitted in the Green Belt: -

- a) The development supports and is linked to the outdoor sporting use of the land for archery, which is acceptable in principle within the Green Belt. The indoor range is very much an essential facility for the overall use of the site for outdoor sport.
- b) The archery club is facing imminent loss of its existing facilities through the non-renewal of its tenancy at Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club. Alternative premises are needed to allow the club to continue.
- c) The development will allow the archery club to continue and provide the associated health and welfare benefits that arise from active participation in sporting activity.
- d) Proposed linkages with the Scouting organisation will further the participation of young people in this sporting activity.
- e) There is extensive support for development that provides either improved sporting opportunities, or maintain those that exist, within Adopted and Emerging Development Plan policies, the NPPF, and other sporting strategies produced by the Council.
- f) Establishment of their own facilities will allow the archery club to expand and enhance the offer that it can provide. For example, access to the outdoor shooting range is currently restricted to times when the facility is not being used by Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club.
- g) In addition to providing facilities for the Rochdale Company of Archers, once the existing premises at Rochdale Rugby Union Football Club is vacated it will allow the Rugby Club to improve its offer. Its intention is to use the space vacated to provide gym facilities for members and women's changing rooms. Approval of the application will therefore help with the sporting development of both the Rugby Union and Archery clubs.
- h) The outdoor shooting range requires a sizeable area of open land. Such land is unavailable within the urban area and if it was the club could not compete on the open market with commercial businesses that wished to purchase land for housing or employment uses. A Green Belt site, where such sporting uses are appropriate, is therefore the club's only realistic way forward to find a new home.
- i) The proposed building is sensitively designed and discreetly located. The building will resemble an agricultural building and would not appear out of place in the locality. No unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area will therefore arise.

In conclusion, there are justifiable 'very special circumstances' why the indoor shooting facility should be allowed. Construction of the facility in the Green Belt should be permitted. Compliance with Development Plan policies G4 from the Core Strategy, D4 from the 2006 UDP, and G11 from the emerging Greater Manchester Spatial Framework are therefore met.

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10.4 Planning Policy Support for the development and facilities required for sport.

Setting aside Green Belt considerations, there is extensive Planning Policy support for development that provides either improved sporting opportunities, or maintain those that exist, within Adopted and Emerging Development Plan policies and the NPPF. Policies C6 and C8 from the Core Strategy and LT/1 and G/5 from the 2006 UDP all aim to improve sporting facilities.

Policy LT/9 from the 2006 UDP is also relevant. The policy aims to protect existing sporting facilities in a sporting use from being lost to other uses. This is not quite the case here as when the Archery Club is required to vacate the Rugby Club premises, it is understood that the Rugby Club will continue to use the premises for its own sporting purposes. However, the policy is a clear indication that ensuring that the opportunities exist for sports clubs to operate is an important consideration. The Archery Club needs the Council's support by permitting this application and allowing the club to continue and develop its sporting offer.

Policy JP-P7 from the emerging Spatial Framework has similar objectives to LT/9 and is therefore equally applicable. The policy specifies recognises that an objective is 'Enabling the continued development of major sports facilities and events, which can further enhance Manchester's international sporting reputation'.

Finally, there is support given within Paragraphs 102 and 103 of the NPPF that look to both develop access to opportunities for sport and protect existing buildings and land that have a sporting use.

The Planning Policy support for the enhancement and protection of sports development is an important factor in the reasons why development should be permitted.

10.5 Impact on the character and appearance of the area

The application site comprises two distinct areas each with their own characteristics. The southern part of the application site comprises existing pastoral fields. The outdoor archery use will not change the character of those fields and the land will be retained as grass. On days when shooting takes place targets will be placed on the land, but in the interests of protecting such equipment (from theft and deterioration due to exposure to the elements) they will be removed from the shooting field after use and stored internally.

The only physical works required for the outdoor shooting range comprise the formation of permeable hardcore path along the shooting line, and the erection of a two meter high fence on the northern boundary. The path will ensure that the ground does not become excessively worn or muddy, and in particular, will enable easier access for wheelchair users. The fence is required for safety reasons, but due to its limited height there will be no unacceptable visual impact.

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The northern part of the application site comprises a previously developed compound that is enclosed by existing tree screening. A building that was used as a training centre for scout leaders, with associated parking previously occupied the site, but that has now been demolished.

The proposed new building is to be a portal framed structure and will resemble a modern agricultural building. Materials and finished colours have been chosen to ensure that the development does not appear out of character with the area. Due to the design of the building, and in particular due to the existing tree screening that will substantially obscure the building from public view, there will be no wider unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area.

The proposed car park is to be appropriately located within the compound area to the north of the proposed new building. Existing screening will obscure that parking area from general public view. It is envisaged that a permeable hardcore surface will be provided. The impact on the character and appearance of the area through the construction of the car park will be minimal.

To the north of the compound there is a public right of way. Views of the proposed new building and parking area will be possible from this footpath, but the development will be largely screened from public view by the existing trees.

In summary the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the local area, and openness of the Green Belt, will be very minimal. The outdoor shooting range is to be located on the existing pastoral fields and there will very minimal built development, as a result this aspect of the proposals will not have any unacceptable impact on the character of the area. The new indoor range, associated facilities, and car parking area are all to be sited on previously developed land within the existing screened compound and therefore the resulting visual impact on the area will be very minimal.

10.6 Neighbour Amenity

There are no neighbours that would be particularly close to the site and the sport is not a noisy or intrusive activity. It is considered that there would be no unacceptable impact on neighbours as a result of the proposed development.

10.7 Highway Safety

The existing vehicular access and track to the site is to be re-used. Visibility at that access is good and the traffic speed is limited to 20 mph. Adequate car parking is proposed to serve the proposed use. The existing access track to the site is to be re-used, with any potholes infilled with matching materials, and two passing places to be provided along its length.

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10.8 Flood Risk / Drainage

The site does not form part of a Flood Risk Area. The proposed parking area would be constructed with a permeable limestone chipping surface and would therefore not give rise to runoff. Roof water from the new building would be discharged to an on-site soakaway.

Foul drainage from the development is planned to discharge to a recently installed private water treatment plant at the neighboring scout facility. It is understood that the facility is significantly oversized for the scout's requirements and can accommodate the additional flows from this development. The proposed hard surfaced areas are all to be of permeable construction and therefore water would soakaway. Roof water from the proposed indoor range would be discharged and allowed to soakaway on land within Rochdale Company of Archers' ownership to the south of the outdoor shooting range.

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11. Summary / Conclusion

The proposed development is essential to allow an existing established archery club to continue to offer sporting opportunities within the Borough of Rochdale. The club's existing tenancy is immanently due to expire and is not to be renewed. The Council is therefore requested to provide support to the club, permit the application, and allow the Archery Club to continue for the benefit of the Borough and wider community.

The application is a joint submission with Ashworth Valley Scout Campsite who operate a campsite and other group accommodation for Scouts at the application site. They presently offer a wide range of activities for visiting Scout groups and this proposal will allow significantly improved archery facilities and training in this sporting discipline.

The provision of essential facilities to support an outdoor sporting use is acceptable and appropriate development within the Green Belt that is supported by both Local and National Planning Policy. The development is acceptable with respect to all other planning considerations and impacts.

Both organisations are excited by the proposals and keen to secure an approval that will allow the sporting and other benefits of the development to be realised. The sport of Archery generates little noise and has a minimal visual impact. It can be enjoyed by participants of all abilities and disabilities, and all ages. The Applicants would welcome engagement with the Council with view to delivering the application proposals.