



**LITTLEBOROUGH SPORTS IMPACT
ASSESSMENT**

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Prepared for:
Bloor Homes

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Littleborough Sports Impact Assessment

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Introduction

This assessment of outdoor sports facilities and greenspace provision will form part of a hybrid planning application for the development of 312 new homes and a primary school with associated works (referred to as ‘the Proposed Development’).

The assessment will consider the baseline for outdoor sports facilities in the study area, focussing primarily on accessibility and quantity, with considerations for quality based on Rochdale Borough Council’s 2016 audit of playing pitches. The assessment will function as a live document and will be updated with pertinent information as necessary.

Planning context

Rochdale Borough Council’s Adopted Core Strategy¹ sets out the long-term spatial strategy for future development in Rochdale and addressing the community’s key priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy². Strategic Objective 2 establishes a goal to create successful and healthy communities. The Strategy sets eight aims to achieve this strategic objective, two of which are particularly relevant to this assessment: C6 - Improving health and wellbeing, and C8 - Improving community, sport, leisure, and cultural facilities.

C6 states that the Council will improve people’s health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities by creating an economic, physical, and social environment which promotes and supports healthy lifestyles. This will focus on the provision of education, community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities in town centres, local centres, and areas of greatest health deprivation.

C8 states that the Council will support and promote the provision of better community, sport, leisure, and cultural facilities. Facilities that serve the borough, and facilities that attract large numbers of people, are required to be located within or adjoining the town centre. The Council aims to work with stakeholders responsible for provision to meet the needs and demands of communities.

Rochdale Borough Council’s Playing Pitch Strategy 2016 – 2026³ was developed following best practice guidance from Sport England, focussing on the main pitch sports of cricket, football, hockey, lacrosse, rounders, rugby league and rugby union. The strategy sets out three strategic aims:

1. Protect the existing supply of sports facilities where needed to meet current or future needs.
2. Enhance outdoor sports facilities through improving quality and management of sites.
3. Provide new outdoor sports facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.

The proposed development is anticipated to introduce 833 new residents to the local community, and 2,020 new residents are anticipated to be introduced cumulatively from the local development pipeline, as described in Table 1. This does not account for natural population growth that will occur simultaneously. Provision of outdoor sports facilities has been outlined by the Council as paramount to creating successful and healthy communities in Rochdale. It is important that demand for these facilities can be met with respect to reasonable distance from dwellings, in sufficient quantity and quality, now and in the future.

¹ Available online at: <https://www.rochdale.gov.uk/downloads/download/266/core-strategy>

² Available online at:

<https://democracy.rochdale.gov.uk/documents/s4862/A%20Rochdale%20SCS%20version%2012.pdf>

³ Available online at: <https://www.rochdale.gov.uk/downloads/download/446/playing-pitch-strategy>

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Table 1: Committed developments to be considered within the ES

LPA Ref:	Site Address	Description	Applicant	Number of Units	Status	Approx. Distance from the Site
21/01146/FUL	Former Akzo Nobel Site	Residential development - erection of up to 127 residential dwellings including new vehicular access points, footpaths, cycle paths, boundaries, landscaping, creation of open space, a pumping station and other associated works	Vistry Partnerships Ltd And Homes England	127	Valid 8 Sept 2021 – Awaiting Decision	0m (adjacent)
19/00262/FUL	Land Off New Road, Littleborough	Residential development of 96 dwellings together with associated services, drainage, access arrangements and car parking including the demolition of the existing building on site	Russell Homes	96	Approved 10 January 2020	200m (north)
20/00639/FUL	The Soccer Village (former Birchinley Manor Equestrian Centre), Wildhouse Lane, Milnrow, OL16 3TW	Demolition of the existing buildings, hardstanding areas and sports pitches, and the erection of 47 dwelling houses including provision of associated roads, footways, public open space, parking areas, drainage, landscaping and boundary treatments along with ground levelling works, works to trees and ponds and other associated works	Lancet Homes	47	Approved 17 May 2021	1,550m (south)
22/01364/FUL	Land West Of Smithy Bridge Road, Littleborough	Residential development: erection of up to 199 dwellings including vehicular access on to Smithy Bridge Road, with internal highways, car parking, footpaths, cycle paths, boundaries, gardens, open space and other associated works	Taylor Wimpey	199	Decision pending – validated 7 Nov 2022	700m (north-west)

Source: Stantec

Standards for outdoor sports facilities and greenspace

The evidence base for standards of outdoor sports facilities provision for the proposed development are:

- Fields in Trust Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play (2008)
- Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy 2016 – 2026 (2016)
- Fields in Trust Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play (2020)
- Green Infrastructure Framework – Principles and Standards for England (2023)

The guidance from the above documents has been consolidated into local standards for outdoor sports facilities provision across three areas of consideration: distance, quantity, and quality.

I. DISTANCE

Rochdale Borough Council does not hold an evidence base for the median drive time between dwellings and sports facilities / playing pitches. Therefore, guidance from Fields in Trust has been used as a proxy. A summary of these benchmarks is provided in Table 2.

The median walking distance from a dwelling to a playing pitch in England was 1,200m, equating to a 15-minute walk. The median walking time from a dwelling to tennis courts and bowling greens in urban areas was 20 minutes. Additionally, Fields in Trust's suggested distance between a dwelling and a synthetic athletics track was equivalent to a 30-minute drive time.

Table 2: Summary of England playing pitches benchmark standard, travel time (minutes)

Outdoor sport	Urban	Rural
Playing Pitch	15 (walk)	-
Athletics	30 (drive)	45 (drive)
Tennis	20 (walk)	20 (drive)
Bowls	20 (walk)	20 (drive)

Source: Fields in Trust

Table 3 provides a summary of the benchmarks for access to green space within reasonable distance of a dwelling.

Table 3: Summary of accessible greenspace standards, size, distance, and travel time

Greenspace type	Min size (ha)	Max distance (km)	Max journey (min)
Sub-regional	500	10	30-40 (cycle)
District	100	5	15-20 (cycle)
Wider Neighbourhood	20	2	35 (walk)
Neighbourhood	10	1	15 (walk)
Local	2	0.3	5 (walk)
Doorstep	0.5	0.2	<5 (walk)

Source: Natural England

II. QUANTITY

Table 3 provides a summary of the benchmarks for quantity of green space within reasonable distance of a dwelling. Natural England, as per the Green Infrastructure Framework⁴, has set a further capacity standard for a minimum of 3 hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 population, in this case with respect to the population of Rochdale Borough Council.

Fields in Trust's Planning and Outdoor Design (2008) states that the median level of provision for all outdoor sports facilities, including playing pitches, was 1.32 hectares per 1,000 population. Littleborough, within Rochdale Borough Council's administrative area, is subject to the standard of 1.15 hectares per 1,000 population for playing pitches and 1.60 hectares per 1,000 population for all outdoor sports facilities (see Table 3 below). Additionally, the guidance suggests provision of one synthetic athletics track with floodlighting per 250,000 people living within a 30-minute drive time. A summary of the benchmarks of provision for outdoor sports facilities per 1,000 of the population is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of benchmark standards, hectares per 1,000 population

Area type	Playing pitch	All outdoor sport
Urban	1.15	1.60
Rural	1.72	1.76
Overall	1.20	1.60

Source: Fields in Trust

III. QUALITY

There is no formal standard for quality of outdoor sports facilities in Rochdale; however, the Playing Pitch Strategy emphasised the negative impact that overplay can have. Fields in Trust's Guidance for Outdoor Sport sets out the following guidelines for outdoor sports facility quality:

- Quality appropriate to the intended level of performance, designed to appropriate technical standards.
- Located where they are of most value to the community to be served.
- Sufficiently diverse recreational use for the whole community.
- Appropriately landscaped.
- Maintained safely and to the highest possible condition with available finance.
- Positively managed taking account of the need for repair and replacement over time as necessary.
- Provision of appropriate ancillary facilities and equipment.
- Provision of footpaths.
- Designed to be free of the fear of harm or crime.

⁴ Available online at:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/downloads/Green%20Infrastructure%20Standards%20for%20England%20Summary%20v1.1.pdf>

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Natural England's adopted standard for quality for greenspace is set out in the 2016 Green Flag Award guidance⁵.

- A Welcoming Place
- Healthy, Safe and Secure
- Well Maintained and Clean
- Environmental Management
- Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage
- Community Involvement
- Marketing and Communication
- Management

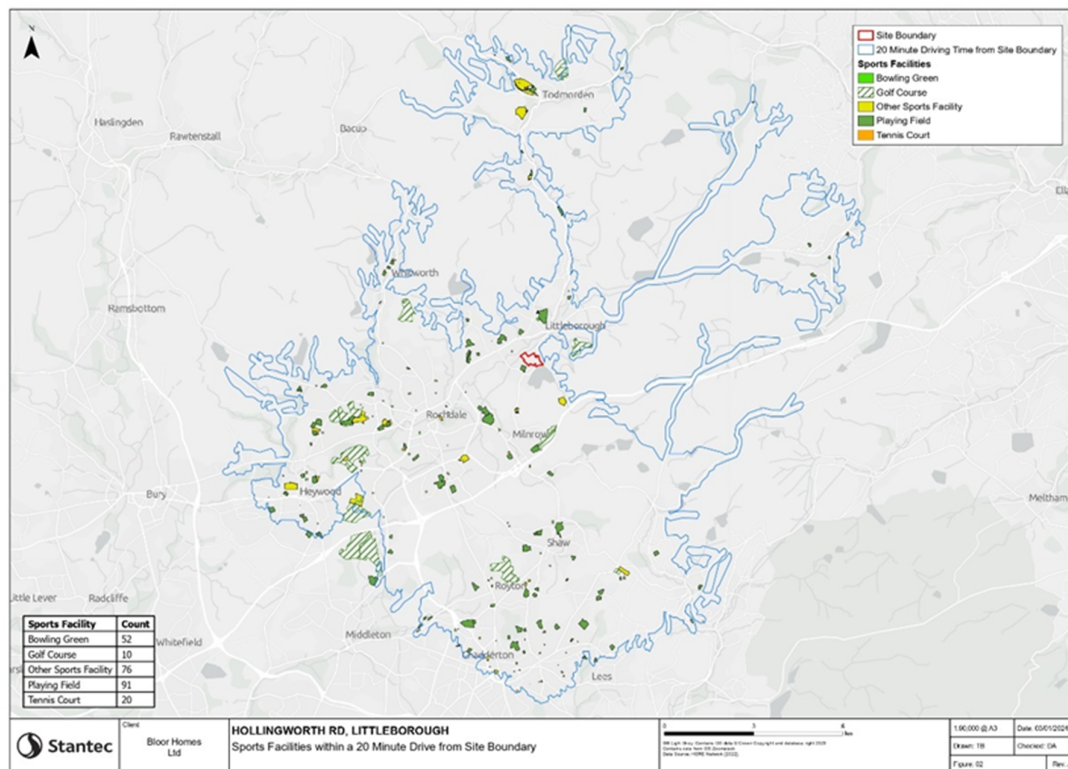
Audit of existing outdoor sports facilities

The following section provides an overview of the baseline provision of outdoor sports facilities around the study area (based on reasonable distance from the application site's boundary via walking and driving modes, in line with Fields in Trust's guidance) with respect to distance, quantity, and quality.

I. DISTANCE

Figure 1 illustrates outdoor sports facility provision within a 20-minute drive time of the site, where all required forms of standard provision can be accessed. Given the site's proximity to Rochdale, there appears to be a diverse range of outdoor sports facility provision.

Figure 1: Outdoor sports facilities within a 20-minute drive time



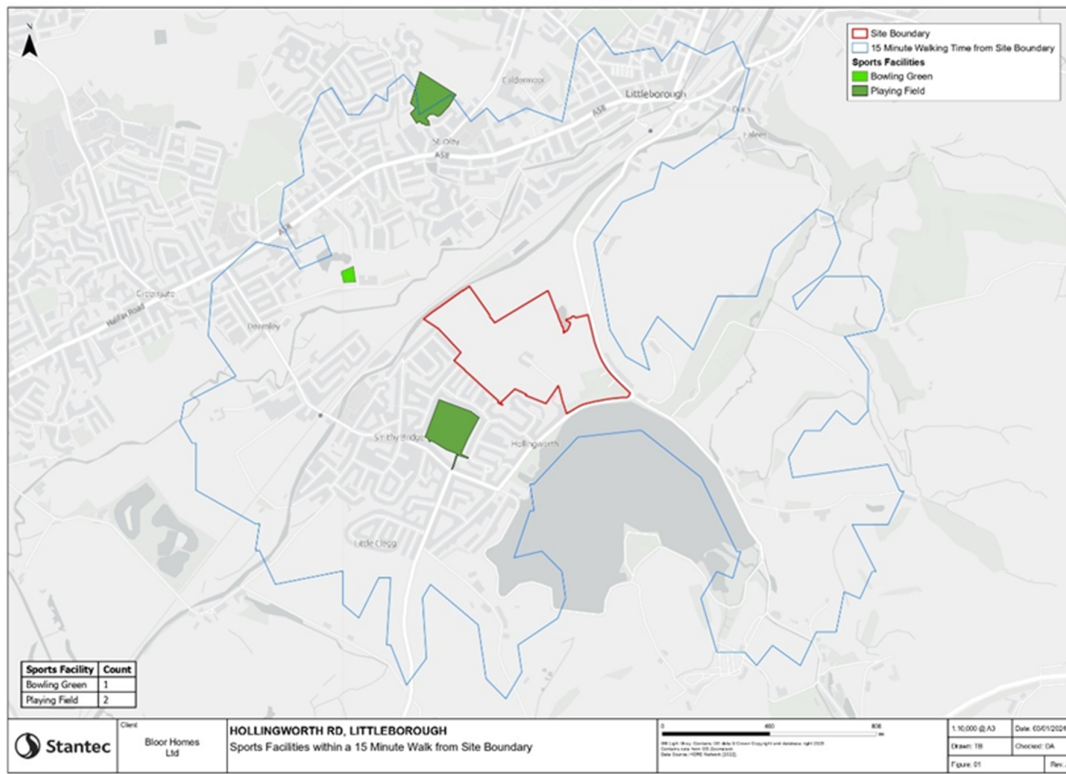
Source: Stantec

Figure 2 shows that the site has access to two playing fields and one bowling green within a 15-minute walking distance.

⁵ Available online at: <https://www.greenflagaward.org/media/1019/green-flag-award-guidelines.pdf>

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Figure 2: Outdoor sports facilities within a 15-minute walk time



Source: Stantec

II. QUANTITY

Table 5 presents a summary of the local outdoor sports facility provision in the 20-minute drive time area from the site. In total, there are 249 sites for outdoor sport provision. This is heavily weighted by playing fields, bowling greens and 'other sports facilities'; a miscellaneous group primarily made up of outdoor areas associated with leisure centres. The sites cumulatively account for approximately 660 hectares; however, this is heavily weighted towards golf courses.

Table 5: Summary of Outdoor Sports Provision within a 20-minute Drive Time of the site

Type	Number of Sites	Total Area (Ha)
Bowling Green	52	13.2
Golf Course	10	334.4
Tennis Courts	20	2.7
Other Sports Facilities	76	107.2
Playing Field	91	205.1
Total	249	662.6

Source: Stantec

There are 3.05 hectares of outdoor sports facility provision per 1,000 population. For Rochdale as a whole, the ratio is 2.64 hectares per 1,000 population, which is still significantly high, at double the respective value for England. This is in line with the broad recommendation of Fields in Trust, that 2.4

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hectares of accessible outdoor space per 1,000 head of population enables residents of all ages to participate in sport and play; 1.6 hectares for outdoor sports facilities and 0.8 hectares for children's play.

The Kingsway Park High School offers sufficient provision for 1 local synthetic athletics track with floodlighting. The Borough of Rochdale's resident population as of 2021 was approximately 223,000; this was 27,000 persons below Guidance for Outdoor Sport guidelines for provision of synthetic athletics tracks. According to ONS population estimates from 2018, the population will not exceed 250,000 until 2043.

III. QUALITY

The 2016 Playing Pitch Strategy outlined spare capacity in 67 match equivalent sessions per week for grass football pitches, 88 for cricket fields, and 9 for rugby league pitches, as shown in Table 6. However, the audit also outlined that a significant proportion of outdoor sport pitches were at risk of degradation from overplay. Overplay was also expressed in match equivalent sessions per week, as summarised in column 3 of Table 6. Overplay was identified in rugby union and rugby league pitches but was most apparent in grass football pitches and cricket fields with overplay of 12 and 70 weekly match equivalent sessions, respectively.

Table 6: Summary of Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitches at Risk of Overplay (2016)

Outdoor sport	Actual spare capacity	Overplay
Football (grass)	67	12
Cricket	88	70
Rugby Union	0	4
Rugby League	9	4

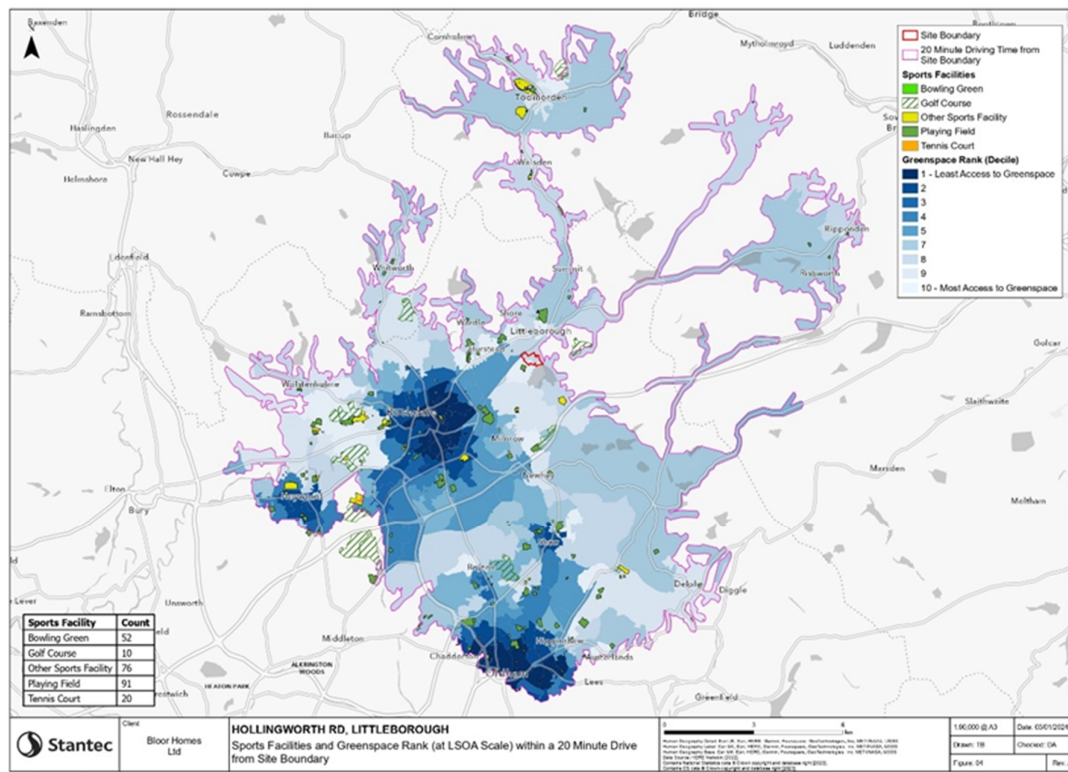
Source: Rochdale Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy 2016 - 2026

Existing greenspace standards

Figure 3 visualises the range of accessibility to greenspace within the 20-minute drive time study area from the proposed development site. At present, the site is considered to have high levels of access to greenspace. Access to greenspace decreases to the lowest deciles in the town centre area of Rochdale; however, over half of the 20-minute drive time area would be considered to provide high levels of access to greenspace. Due to the proximity to the Pennines, and local public parks and playing fields, the site satisfies all of Natural England's standards of accessibility to greenspace.

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Figure 3: Greenspace ranks within a 20-minute drive time



Source: Stantec

The impact of the proposed development

Under the current conditions, there is a healthy overprovision of outdoor sports facilities and greenspace. The proposed development is expected to add 833 people to the local area. Under existing provision of sports facilities and fields, this would decrease the ratio of hectares of sport provision per 1,000 population to 3.05 and 2.63, in the 20-minute drive study area and Rochdale respectively, rendering a low local impact and continued sufficient provision of outdoor sports facilities. With regards to quality, however, the Council is advised to consider and potentially take action on the impact on overplay, as outlined in the Playing Pitch Strategy; this primarily concerns football, the most popular local sport, as well as cricket and rugby (both codes). The introduction of 312 homes and a primary school will reduce the immediate access to greenspace around the site, and the site's greenspace rank. However, following the construction of the proposed development, the site will still satisfy Natural England's standards for access to greenspace and Fields in Trust's Guidance for Outdoor Sport.

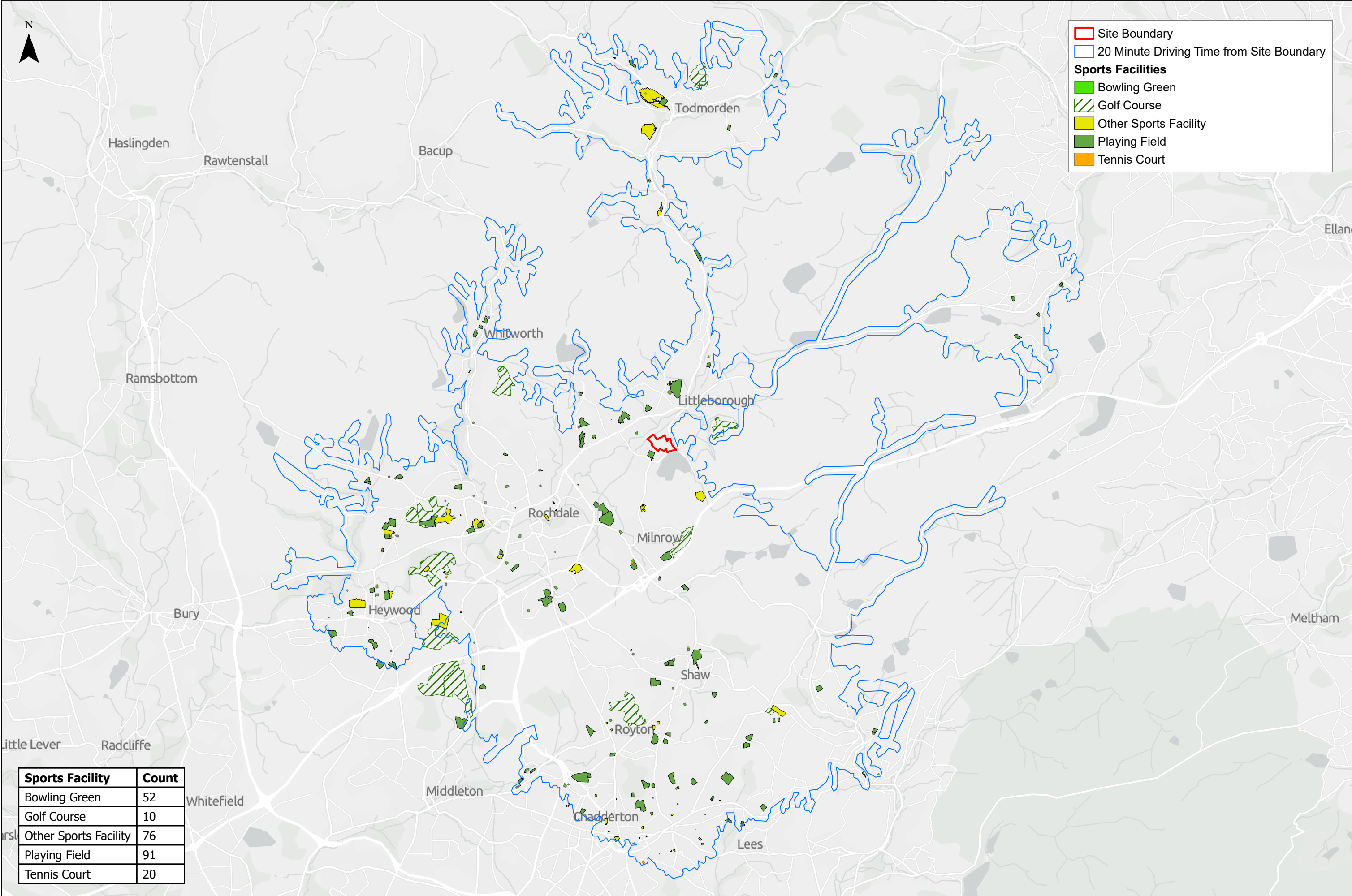
The impact of the cumulative developments

The remaining cumulative developments, as shown in Table 1, are expected to add a further 1,187 residents, making a total of 2,020 people when including the proposed development. Under existing provision of sports facilities and fields, within the 20-minute drive time study area, this would decrease the ratio of hectares of sport provision per 1,000 population to 3.02. This would register as a medium impact; however, provision of outdoor sports facilities would continue to be operating at a surplus. The cumulative impact would further emphasise the need to consider the effect of overplay on the quality of pitches. Despite the cumulative effect, the site will still satisfy Natural England's standards for access to greenspace.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, there is sufficient provision of outdoor sports facilities within the study area, with the one exception of no provision of tennis courts within a 20-minute walking distance. This was a pre-existing local condition of the surrounding area. The scheme and cumulative developments will not negatively impact the local area's ability to provide sufficient levels of outdoor sports facilities. However, consideration will need to be given to the effect of overplay on the quality of pitches, primarily football, cricket, and rugby (both codes). Furthermore, it was found that the current condition of the site ranks highly for greenspace, as per Ordnance Survey data, and that the proposed development will reduce this rank. Nevertheless, there will continue to be a sufficient level of provision of greenspace in the study area with respect to a reasonable distance from the site, the number of hectares of provision, and quality in line with the Green Flag Award guidelines.

Appendix 1 Sports Facilities 20-Minutes Drive



Site Boundary

20 Minute Driving Time from Site Boundary

Sports Facilities

Bowling Green

Golf Course

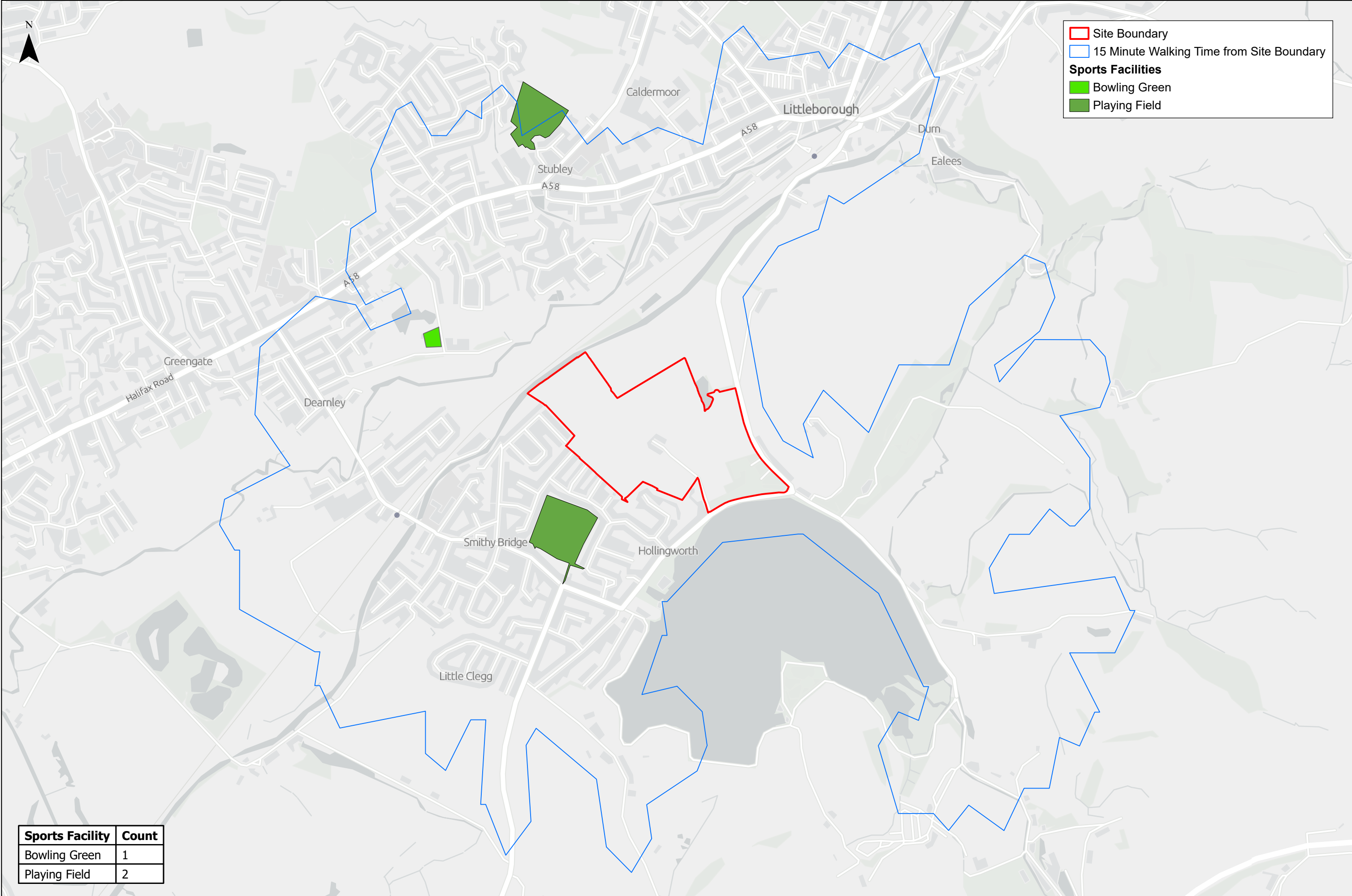
Other Sports Facility

Playing Field

Tennis Court

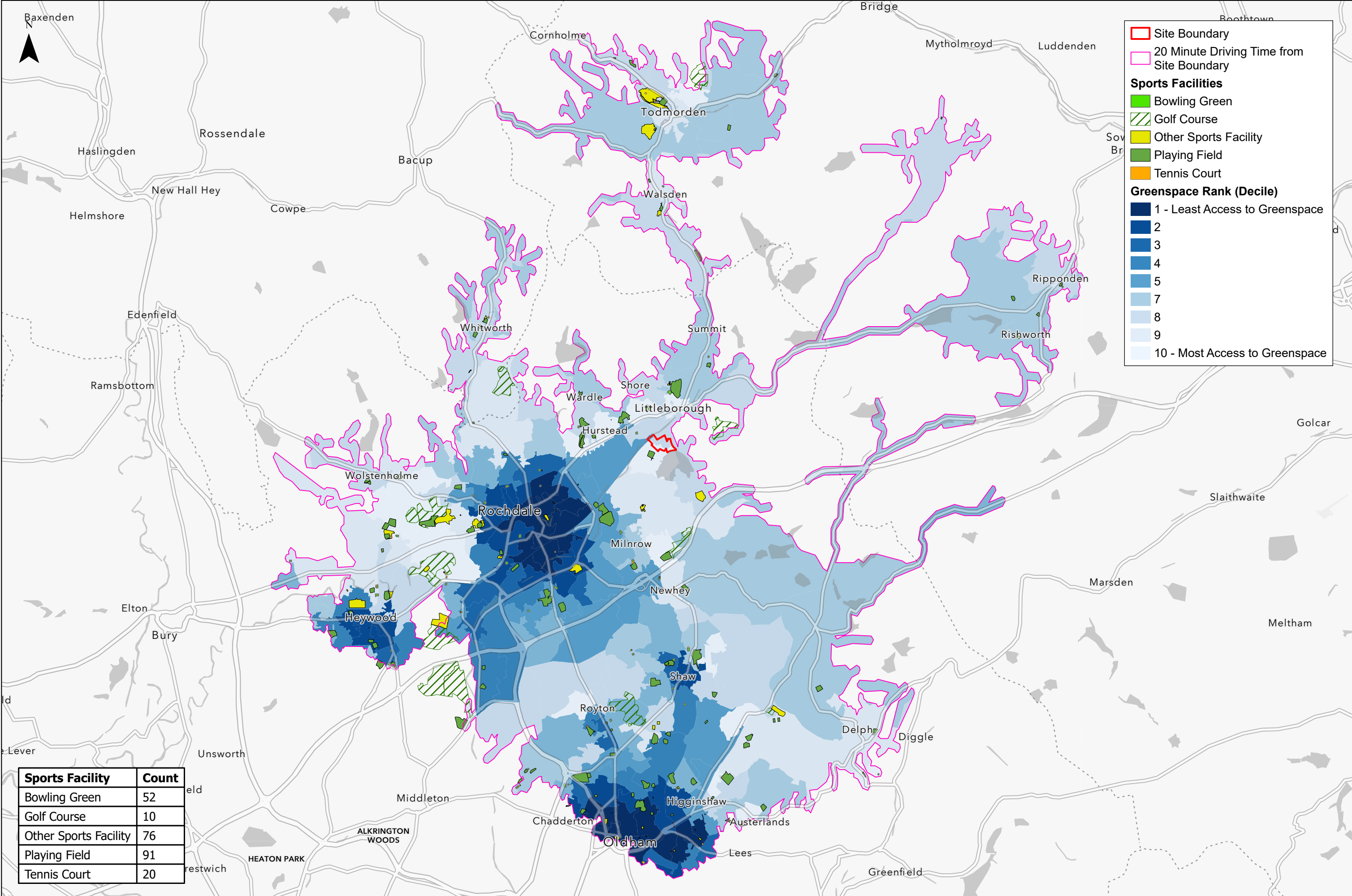
Sports Facility	Count
Bowling Green	52
Golf Course	10
Other Sports Facility	76
Playing Field	91
Tennis Court	20

Appendix 2 Sports Facilities 15-Minutes Drive



Sports Facility	Count
Bowling Green	1
Playing Field	2

Appendix 3 Green Space Rank 20-Minutes Drive



Site Boundary

20 Minute Driving Time from Site Boundary

Sports Facilities

Bowling Green

Golf Course

Other Sports Facility

Playing Field

Tennis Court

Greenspace Rank (Decile)

1 - Least Access to Greenspace

2

3

4

5

7

8

9

10 - Most Access to Greenspace

Sports Facility	Count
Bowling Green	52
Golf Course	10
Other Sports Facility	76
Playing Field	91
Tennis Court	20



Design with
community
in mind

