

Rochdale MBC

FAO: Majid Mir

By email only

9th Sept 2025

**Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England)
Order 2015**

Application Reference: 23/00693/OUT

Site: BELLFIELD MILL LANE (ROCHDALE SACRED HEART), BELFIELD MILL LANE OL16 2UB

**Proposal: Outline application (including access and layout) for the erection of
1no' detached dwelling**

Sport England Reference: PA/23/NW/RO/65846

Thank you for consulting Sport England with regard to the additional information for the above application.

Summary

Sport England **maintains its objection** to this application as it is not considered to meet any of the exceptions to our Playing Fields Policy or to accord with paragraphs 104 and 200 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

We may reconsider this position should amended/additional details be provided to address the following points:

- *A demonstration that any potential requirement to progress to NSL Step Level 6 (Grade 6) can be met*
- *Provision of a Ball Strike Assessment*

Additional information

- 'Response to Sport England' – by Michale Stewart – Cub Secretary

Sport England – statutory consultee role and policy

As previously set out.

The proposal and impact on playing field

As previously set out.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

As previously set out.

Consultation with National Governing Body's for Sport

Sport England has a memorandum of understanding with the pitch sport National Governing Bodies and consults with them on planning proposals. On this occasion, in relation to the submitted additional information, Sport England has previously consulted with the Football Foundation and their response to the submitted additional information is summarised as follows: –

Football Foundation (FF):

- The latest submission does not change the FF position. The applicant has acknowledged the potential for ball stop netting mitigation but has not provided a trajectory assessment to determine level of risk, whether a mitigation system is definitely required and the size and length of the system if required.*
- Most crucially, FF is not confident that the site even in its current setup can meet the requirements of Step 6 (Grade 6). Clubs seeking entry to Step 6 must meet Grade 7 at the time of application, working towards Grade 6 on acceptance, however, must have a 100x64m pitch at the time of application to be considered. When accounting for the need to have minimum 1.83m safety run off areas and hard standing (FF would expect three sides Grade 5 for futureproofing), the total area is nearer to 108x72m which cannot be achieved by extending the pitch in its current location, with or without the triangular shaped application site.*
- To achieve Grade 6 compliance on this site it is almost certain that the club would need to rotate the pitch through approximately 50-60 degrees to run north west to south east. Though this would help achieve the size required, it potentially would create new challenges with achieving compliance relative to the pavilion and exclusive walkway etc. All of this is on the assumption that the works could achieve planning consent in relation to floodlighting specifically, but potentially other factors which may be required at planning stage.*
- SE has suggested potential resolution as proposing a layout which shows the site to meet Grade 6 without needing or impacting on the triangular shape. FF seeks that the applicant develops a proposed Grade 6 layout plan and would likely need to undertake topographical survey of other parts of the site to determine whether reconfiguration is achievable.*
- FF recommends that the club engages with Premier League Stadia Fund Technical Project Manager Ben Costello (benjamin.costello@footballfoundation.org.uk) to explore what could potentially be achieved at the site. Once the club has clarity of how the site could be configured, it could then be able to evidence the planning case for this proposal.*

Sport England's position

Given the above, the latest submitted information does not alter Sport England's previous objection and we need to **maintain a statutory objection** to the application because currently the proposal will use playing field land which could be used by the Rochdale Sacred Heart should they gain promotion to Step 6 of the NLS and which would be compromised by the proposal.

As such, it is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy or paragraphs 104 or 200 of the NPPF.

A noise assessment has been submitted and as Sport England do have the expertise to comment on its content, we defer to the Local Authority's noise expert and their view of the suitability of any proposed mitigation.

Potential to overcome the statutory objection

- *Demonstration that the proposal can be accommodated without prejudice to the future promotion ambitions of Rochdale Sacred Heart FC, taking into account the comments from the Football Foundation above and the advice therein.*
- *Provision of a ball strike assessment.*

Determining the application

If this application is to be presented to a Planning Committee, we would like to be notified in advance of the publication of any committee agendas, report(s) and committee date(s).

If you would like any further information or advice, please forward to planning.north@sportengland.org

Yours sincerely

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Annex

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy

Exception 1

A robust and up-to-date assessment has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of Sport England, that there is an excess of playing field provision in the catchment, which will remain the case should the development be permitted, and the site has no special significance to the interests of sport.

Exception 2

The proposed development is for ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field, and does not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or otherwise adversely affect their use.

Exception 3

The proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:

- reduce the size of any playing pitch;
 - result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins and run-off areas);
 - reduce the sporting capacity of the playing field to accommodate playing pitches or the capability to rotate or reposition playing pitches to maintain their quality;
 - result in the loss of other sporting provision or ancillary facilities on the site;
- or
- prejudice the use of any remaining areas of playing field on the site.

Exception 4

The area of playing field to be lost as a result of the proposed development will be replaced, prior to the commencement of development, by a new area of playing field:

- of equivalent or better quality, and
- of equivalent or greater quantity, and
- in a suitable location, and
- subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements.

Exception 5

The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.

The full 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at:
www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy