

Rochdale MBC

FAO: Majid Mir

By email only

8th Jan 2026

**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

- Applicant comments:

"Further to the Sport England consultation please find attached a Proposed Site Plan for a reconfiguration of the pitch.

The proposals include the Pitch size and accompanying run off's, spectators and dug outs to conform to the Step 6 requirement. If the Club achieve this level on the pitch. The club always has ambitions but can only be Steps 6 by winning on the pitch. The drawing however shows that this can be achieved physically."

The applicant hopes that this will be sufficient to remove the objection. The applicant also added in regard to the ball stop that 'the companies who install these will only do the assessment on an order which we cannot do. Can we please request that this is conditioned.'

The applicant hopes that this meets with our 'agreement as the Club are in need of the revenue this approval will bring.'

- Pitch Relocation Drawing No. 2307 01 Rev A

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):

- *Previously FF had asked the applicant to evidence that a Step 6 NLS compliant facility can be accommodated on the playing field without required use of the proposed space to be lost to the dwelling, to show that this space is not required to enable the outcome.*
- *The Club needs to satisfy it can meet first the Step 7 requirements for the Regional Feeder Leagues which not only includes the 100m x 64m playing area plus 3m run-offs. However, it also needs at least two sides of connected hardstanding of at least 0.9m in width (recommended to be wider approx. 1.5m). It would also need a 50-person covered standing stand.*
- *The ground should then be future proofed to meet Step 6 requirements for the National League System which in addition to the above should ensure a safe walkway for players and officials from the clubhouse, floodlights and ideally additional hardstanding around the pitch. It would also need a 50-person seated stand in addition to the existing standing stand. There would also need to be a paybox/turnstile and a secure ground boundary. The applicant should ensure they fully understand all requirements contained within this document – [Ground Grading Handbook Update 25-26](#).*
- *The applicant now appears to be proposing a 3G surface within the updated plans. This complicates matters and requires additional space. It potentially make it more difficult to evidence the ability to fit a Step 6 facility to evidence this proposal for the dwelling could be permissible. If indeed the application does now want to pursue a 3G pitch to achieve this, the following comments apply:*
 - *In terms of design and layout shown, ideally the goal storage areas should be on the far south side of the pitch in those low use areas, not behind goals. The dugouts can go either side. Spectators should be positioned close to facilities therefore stands etc should be located on the north width side closest to the pavilion.*
 - *A 3G pitch in this location would raise concerns regarding lighting, acoustics, parking and BNG – all matters for the relevant local authority departments to advise on. Additionally, there would need to be intrusive Phase 02 ground investigations.*

- *General comments on the revised plans:*
 - *Floodlights shown on one side of the pitch but not the other. Implication of 4 column system rather than 6 or 8 would mean columns may have to be higher to achieve required illuminance, potentially increasing planning challenge.*
 - *Only one dugout shown.*
 - *No hard standing shown on the plan around the pitch – at least 2 sides required.*
 - *No safe walkway shown on the plan to and from the pitch. This would need to be developed across playing field so could incur playing field loss, though would be for a required ancillary feature to promote sporting use.*
 - *Spectator areas indicated but no spectator stand structures shown on the plan, or relative to hardstanding to access them.*
- *FF views the prospect of the club developing and playing at a higher level as a positive outcome and is not opposed to the application or future direction. The applicant has gone some way to evidencing a Step 6 facility could be accommodated on the site otherwise, but has not fully reflected the complete scope of facilities that would be required to do so. The plans require revision to incorporate additional elements to fully evidence a fully compliant facility could be achieved.*
- *FF recommends the applicant contacts PLSF Technical Project Manager Benjamin Costello (benjamin.costello@footballfoundation.org.uk) should further support or understanding of stadia accreditation requirements be needed.*

Sport England's position

It is noted that the applicant is now identifying an AGP facility which is not currently in place at the site and which would require planning permission itself. There are issues which stem from the possibility of an AGP which could further impact how the proposal is treated in terms of lighting and noise.

It is noted that the latest information does not include a ball strike risk assessment.

Given the above, the latest submitted information does not alter Sport England's previous objections 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.

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.*
- *Provision of lighting assessment if it is the club's intention to develop an AGP.*
- *Provision of amended noise assessment for LPA's review.*

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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Planning Manager

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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