

Officer Report

Case Reference: 25/01159/FUL
Location: Belfield Hall Farm
Albert Royds Street
Rochdale
OL16 5AA
Proposal: Temporary Change of Use of existing building for a period of 3 years to an indoor padel sports facility including the installation of 10No indoor padel courts, reception area with ancillary café, toilets/changing facilities and associated internal works. External works including new entrance door and external refuse and cycle store.
Recommendation: Approve with Conditions
Officer: Anna Hayes

SITE

The application site relates to Unit 1, Bellfield Hall Farm, which comprises an industrial unit located on the southwest side of Albert Royds Street also known as Rochdale Bypass (A664). The unit is currently vacant but was previously in use as a pallet storage facility.

The adjoining industrial unit to the east is currently occupied by Littleborough Carpets, beyond which is the Go Local Extra convenience store and ancillary car park, and adjacent residential property 336 Albert Royds Street. Immediately north of the site is the railway line which runs between the Rochdale and Littleborough stations. To the south of the site, the unit shares a boundary with the residential gardens of the two storey properties on St Ann's Road. Adjoining the site to the southwest is an open parcel of Council owned land comprising a designated Greenspace Corridor, as allocated under saved UDP Policy G8.

Access to the site is taken from Albert Royds Street, through the carpark of the convenience store, past Littleborough Carpets, passing the southern elevation of Unit 1 to the access point on the western elevation of the building.

Unit 1 is of brick construction with metal cladding to the upper elevations. To the rear elevation there are 4 HGV loading docks and two access points with roller shutter doors.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks temporary planning permission, for a period of 3 years, for the change of use of the industrial unit to a padel sports facility (Use Class E(d)). The proposed internal layout includes 8 double courts, 2 single courts, a dedicated reception/refreshment area and WC/Shower facilities.

Externally, the site will accommodate 28 car parking spaces, including two designated for disabled users. Covered cycle storage and a dedicated refuse area will also be provided.

The proposed hours of operation are Monday to Sunday, from 06:00 to 00:00 (midnight). The supporting statement confirms that all padel court sessions must be booked in advance. To manage demand efficiently, session start times will be staggered: 50% of the courts will commence on the hour, while the remaining 50% will begin at thirty minutes past the hour. Courts may be reserved for either 60-minute or 90-minute sessions.

Access arrangements are proposed to remain unchanged.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Development Plan

Planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise and the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making.

The development plan for the proposal consists of the Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan, Rochdale Core Strategy (CS), adopted 2016, saved Unitary Development Plan (UDP) policies, and the Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Plan April 2013. The Council also has an adopted series of Supplementary Planning Documents and Supplementary Guidance Notes, which are other material considerations.

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE) (2024)

The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan was adopted and became part of the statutory development plan for each of the 9 authorities covered by the plan on 21st March 2024. The following policies are relevant:

Sustainable and Resilient Places

JP-S1 Sustainable Development

JP-S2 Carbon and Energy

JP-S4 Flood Risk and the Water Environment

Greener Places

JP-G1 Landscape Character

JP-G8 A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Places for People

JP-P1 Sustainable Places

JP-P2 Heritage

Connected Places

JP-C1 An Integrated Network

JP-C6 Walking and Cycling

JP-C8 Transport Requirements of New Development

Rochdale Core Strategy (CS)

SO1 Delivering a more prosperous economy

E2 Increasing jobs and prosperity

E3 Focusing on economic growth corridors and areas

SO2 Creating successful and healthy communities

C6 Health and well-being

C8 Improving community, sport, leisure and community facilities

SO3 Improving design, image and quality of place

P1 Improving image

P2 Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage

P3 Improving design of new development

SO4 Promoting a Greener Environment

G6 Enhancing Green Infrastructure

G7 Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity

G8 Managing water resources and flood risk

G9 Reducing the impact of pollution, contamination and land instability

SO5 Improving accessibility and delivering sustainable transport

T2 Improving accessibility

Managing delivery and monitoring progress

DM1 General Development requirements

SD1 Delivering sustainable development

Rochdale Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

G/D/1 Defined Urban Area

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

No recent relevant history.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways and Engineering

No objection to the proposal.

Environmental Health

No comments received to date.

Network Rail

No objections to the proposal.

GM Fire Service

No comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS

In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, the application has been advertised by neighbour notification letters and site notice.

2 objections have been received from 1 person, plus 2 neutral representations also from 1 person. The comments raised are summarised below:

Object

1. Plans and documents are not available to view online. This technical failure constitutes a breach of the Council's statutory duty under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, which mandates that all application documents must be available for public inspection.... This is a matter of procedural unfairness and leaves any future decision on this application highly vulnerable to a Judicial Review.

Neutral

- Noise impact (during and after construction once the sports padel facility is operational)
- What measures are in place to protect amenity from construction activities
- The proposal is likely to result in increased traffic movements
- Security and on-site anti-social behaviour
- External works and disturbance
- Conditions should be added to protect privacy

Officer notes:

The objector brought to the LPAs attention that plans were not available on the public register as of 26th February 2026. Officers have previously reviewed the files online prior to this date, so this may have been a temporary error. However, the application has been advertised by neighbour notification letter and site notice dated 2nd February 2026 with consultation running formally until 23rd February 2026 but with the application open for further comments until the final consideration and determination of the application in March 2026. In any case, Officers have allowed a further 21 days following 26th February 2026 prior to moving to a decision for completeness. No further comments have been received.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that the planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions including 'developments below the threshold', every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met. This objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity

value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

PfE Policy JP-G8 also states that through local planning and associated activities a net enhancement of biodiversity resources will be sought where relevant. Development will be expected to achieve a measurable net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%.

In this instance the development falls below the de minimis threshold and is therefore exempt from statutory BNG.

ANALYSIS

Principle

The proposal relates to Unit 1 of Bellfield Farm, a brownfield site within the defined urban area as designated by saved UDP Policy G/D/1. The existing industrial unit is not within a defined employment zone, allowing greater flexibility over its future use. The site is currently vacant, and the proposed development would bring an unused building back into productive use for a temporary three year period, generating employment, providing sports and leisure opportunities, and contributing to wider regeneration objectives. These outcomes align with PfE Policy JP J2, which seeks to maintain a diverse supply of employment sites and premises for businesses of all sizes, and with PfE Policy JP C1, which aims to support development patterns that minimise the need to travel by ensuring that recreation and leisure uses are well located and accessible. The proposal would also support PfE Policy JP P7, which aims to protect and enhance sports and recreation facilities across the plan area. At a local level, Core Strategy Policy C6 seeks to improve health and well-being by creating environments that support healthy lifestyles and protect and enhance sport and recreational areas, while Policy C8 promotes the provision of improved community, sport and leisure facilities.

Sequential Test

Due to the nature of the application, in accordance with paragraph 91 of the NPPF, there is a question of whether the sequential test should be applied since 'intensive sport and recreation uses' are defined as being a 'main town centre use'.

The proposed development comprises of ten courts. The floor plans indicate that the courts will be situated in close proximity limiting any capacity for continuous court-side spectator provision. Other facilities, including refreshments from the reception area, are proposed though these are ancillary to the main use as a padel tennis club. For these reasons, it is considered that a sequential test is not a requirement of this application since the development does not constitute an intense sports use as defined by the NPPF.

In summary, the key benefits include bringing a vacant brownfield unit back into use, supporting employment creation, improving access to sport and leisure facilities, and contributing positively to health, well being and regeneration objectives. Taken together, the proposed temporary use of the unit as a padel sports facility is found to be acceptable in principle, subject to full consideration of other material development management issues.

Design

One of the core planning principles of the NPPF is to always seek to secure high quality design. Section 12 of the NPPF places particular emphasis on achieving high quality design and section 16 places value on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraphs 131 and 135 of the NPPF state that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area and are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping.

The proposal is for the use of the building as a padel sports facility. No significant external alterations are proposed, and the works are limited to a new entrance door to the west facing elevation within the existing door opening.

Overall, the proposals are found to be acceptable in relation to visual amenity and compliant with P1, P2, P3 of the Rochdale Core Strategy as well as design policies contained within the NPPF and PfE.

Residential Amenity

At paragraph 135, the NPPF outlines the importance of planning in securing good standards of amenity for future and existing occupiers of land and buildings. Core Strategy policies DM1, G9, C1 and C6 cumulatively seek to reduce air and noise pollution, and DM1 in particular requires development to not adversely affect the amenity of residents or users through visual intrusion, overbearing impact, overshadowing or loss of privacy.

The site's current lawful use is as an industrial unit, most recently operating as a pallet storage facility, with established 24-hour access and regular use by HGVs. The nearest residential properties are those adjoining the site to the south on St Ann's Road and 336 Albert Royds Street to the northeast.

The proposed development is unlikely to result in significant noise or disturbance when compared to the existing industrial use of the site, particularly given the proposed hours of operation (06:00–00:00, seven days a week) and the fact that the use would be contained within a building that has limited openings, thereby preventing unacceptable impacts on outlook, natural light or privacy. The site also has existing lighting and CCTV for site security.

While objections have been raised regarding noise, operational activity, traffic, security and potential anti-social behaviour, these concerns are acknowledged but, for the reasons outlined above, the proposed use is considered materially less disruptive than the existing lawful operations. Although vehicle movements past the unit and alongside neighbouring gardens have been noted, this is an established and longstanding access route historically used by larger HGVs, and with existing boundary treatments in place, the level of activity associated with the proposal would not be materially more harmful.

Having regard to paragraph 193 of the NPPF, the LPA are satisfied that the new development could integrate sympathetically and effectively with surrounding existing businesses without unacceptably harming the functionality of existing nearby uses/businesses.

On balance, the proposal is considered acceptable when assessed against paragraph 135 of the NPPF and Core Strategy Policies DM1, G9, C1 and C6. The development would not give rise to unacceptable impacts on outlook, privacy, light or residential amenity, and would represent an overall reduction in noise and disturbance compared to the established current lawful use. Accordingly, the proposal is in accordance with the amenity expectations of paragraph 135 and the requirements of Policies DM1, G9, C1 and C6.

Access and Highway Safety

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that “Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios”.

Policy T2 of the adopted Core Strategy seeks to improve accessibility by locating development where good access to public transport is available or can be provided and, in all circumstances, prioritises the safety, accessibility and amenity of those who live or have business in the area. Policy DM1 also states that all development proposals should provide satisfactory vehicular access with adequate parking, manoeuvring, and servicing arrangements taking into account of the proposed use and location.

The application is supported by a Transport Assessment and study. The Local Highway Authority (LHA) have been consulted on the application and raise no objections based off the submission proposals (summarised below):

The application site is located directly off the strategic highway network on a busy public transport route, and the level of traffic associated with the proposed use is considered to be within acceptable limits. The proposed site access is longstanding and suitable for all vehicles, and no changes are proposed to the existing highway network, no new highways are to be created, and no public rights of way would be affected. The level of parking provision is adequate given the staggered booking times and the availability of sustainable transport options. While it is acknowledged that pedestrians must cross the site to reach the facility at the rear via the service yard serving neighbouring businesses, the level of associated vehicle activity is not

considered sufficient to warrant an objection on grounds of inadequate pedestrian access. Overall, no new road safety concerns arise as a result of the proposals.

Whilst the LHA are satisfied with the pedestrian movements through the site – officers considered that a clear and legible zone for pedestrians and users of the proposed padel facility should be included within the proposals. Particularly as some users will be accessing by foot/public transport and travelling through the site from the highway, through to the building entrance along a shared access road (which is shared with the adjacent unit which presents conflict risks with pedestrians). A designated footway has been included on the updated site plan, reference 25-99-00-000 R3, which is deemed acceptable.

On the basis of the above, Officers consider the proposal to be acceptable in regard to highway safety and would not be in conflict with p116 of the NPPF and Policy T2 of the Core Strategy.

Conclusion

Overall, the proposed development would see the effective reuse of a vacant building and generate employment opportunities whilst also encouraging social interaction and supporting healthy lifestyle opportunities for sport and recreation. The scheme is acceptable from both a visual and residential amenity perspective and satisfies highway safety requirements. The application is therefore recommended for approval, subject to conditions.

Recommendation: Approve with Conditions

Condition(s) (6)

- 1 The permission hereby granted is for a limited period only, expiring on the date of three years from the date of this permission; and the works and use comprising the development for which permission is hereby granted are required to be respectively removed and discontinued.

Reason: In the interests of amenity and as the proposals are for a temporary period only pursuant to policies DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy.

- 2 The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following drawings and documents hereby approved unless otherwise required by the conditions below:

Location Plan dated 12.11.2025

Proposed Floor Plan – Drawing number 25-99-20-001 revision R1

Proposed Elevations – Drawing number 25-99-20-002 revision R1

Proposed Elevation 2 – Drawing number 25-99-20-003 revision R1

Proposed Site Plan - Drawing number 25-99-20-004 revision R3

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure a satisfactory development in accordance with the policies within the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the saved Rochdale Unitary Development Plan, the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 3 The approved Padel facility shall not be open outside the following hours: Mondays to Sundays 06:00 to 24:00 (Midnight).

Reason: In interests of amenity in order to reduce noise and general disturbance in accordance with Policy DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy.

- 4 The car parking indicated on the Proposed Site Plan reference 25-99-20-004 R3, shall be surfaced, demarcated and made available for use prior to the Padel Tennis Centre being brought in to use. The car parking shall then be available at all times whilst the Padel Tennis Centre is operational and be retained thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of highway and pedestrian safety in accordance with Policies P3, T2 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-C8 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5 The designated pedestrian walkway as indicated on the Proposed Site Plan reference 25-99-20-004 R3, shall be surfaced, demarcated and made available for use prior to the Padel Tennis Centre being brought in to use. The designated pedestrian walkway shall then be available at all times whilst the Padel Tennis Centre is operational and be retained unobstructed thereafter.

Reason: In the interests of highway and pedestrian safety in accordance with Policies P3, T2 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-C8 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 6 The cycle store arrangements shown on the approved plans to serve the development hereby permitted shall be made fully available for use prior

to the development being first brought into use and shall be retained as constructed thereafter for their intended purpose.

Reason: To ensure the provision of satisfactory and secure facilities for cycle storage and in the interests of visual amenity in accordance with Policies P3, T2 and DM1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, Policies JP-P1 and JP-C6 of the adopted Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Approval Reason(s) (1)

7 Procedure Statement

The Local Planning Authority worked proactively with the applicant to identify various solutions during the application process to ensure that the proposal comprised sustainable development and would improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area and would accord with the development plan. These were incorporated into the scheme and/or have been secured by planning conditions.