

Rochdale BC

FAO: Anna Hayes

By email only

15th June 2026

Planning Application: PL/2026/0374

Site: RYDINGS SPECIAL SCHOOL (CLOSED), KINGS GROVE OL12 9HR

Proposal: Change of use of existing hardstanding to school car parking for up to five years and associated works

Sport England Reference: PA/26/NW/RO/74027

Thank you for consulting Sport England in respect of the above application proposal.

Summary: Sport England currently **objects** to the planning application, as it has been demonstrated that the proposal meets Exception 4 of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and paragraph 104 of the NPPF.

Sport England –Statutory Role and Policy

It is understood that the proposal prejudices the use, or leads to the loss of use, of land being used as a playing field or has been used as a playing field in the last five years, as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (Statutory Instrument 2015 No. 595). The consultation with Sport England is therefore a statutory requirement.

Sport England considers the planning application in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (particularly Para 104) and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy, which is presented within its 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document':

https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport#playing_fields_policy

Sport England's policy is to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of, all/part of a playing field, unless one or more of the five exceptions stated in its policy apply. Attached as an appendix to this response.

The Proposal and Impact on the Playing Field

The site constitutes playing field, which it is understood is connected to the now closed school across the football to the southwest. Sport England is considering the proposal under its statutory requirement as the images on Google Earth appear to indicate that the basketball facility is still in use, with an open gated access and maintained baskets.

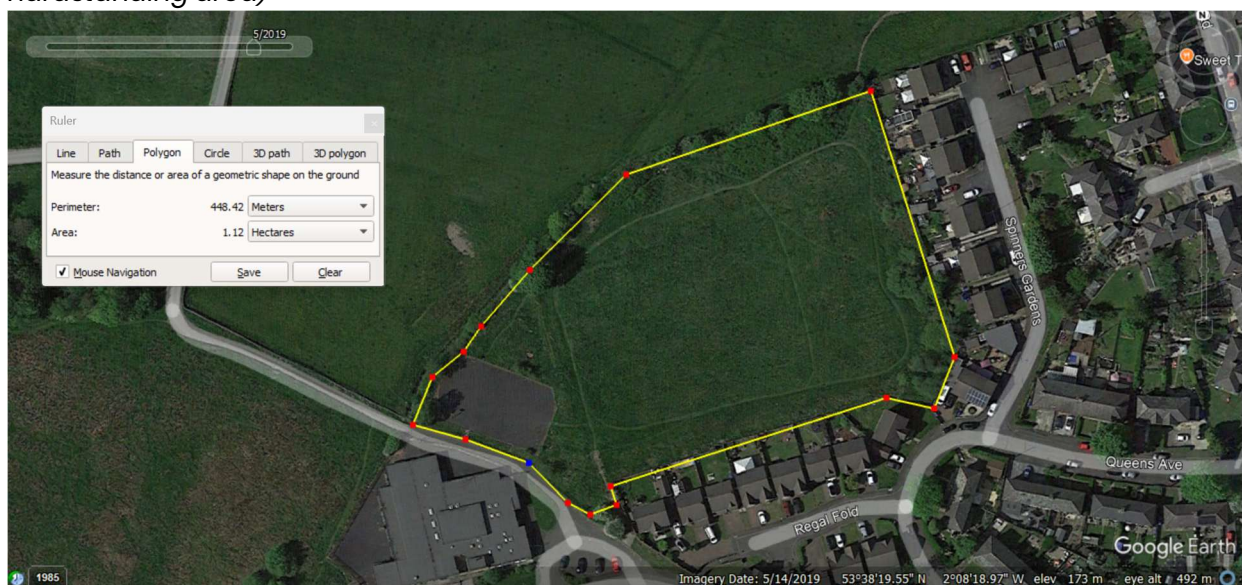
The proposal is for the creation of a temporary use of the existing hardstanding playing field for car parking for the school. Although the proposal is temporary, this would be for 5 years and given the extent of engineering works proposed, it is unlikely that the area would be

reinstated and no reinstatement proposal has been submitted. However, on the basis that the Planning Statement indicates that this will be achieved, Sport England will consider the proposal as 'temporary.'

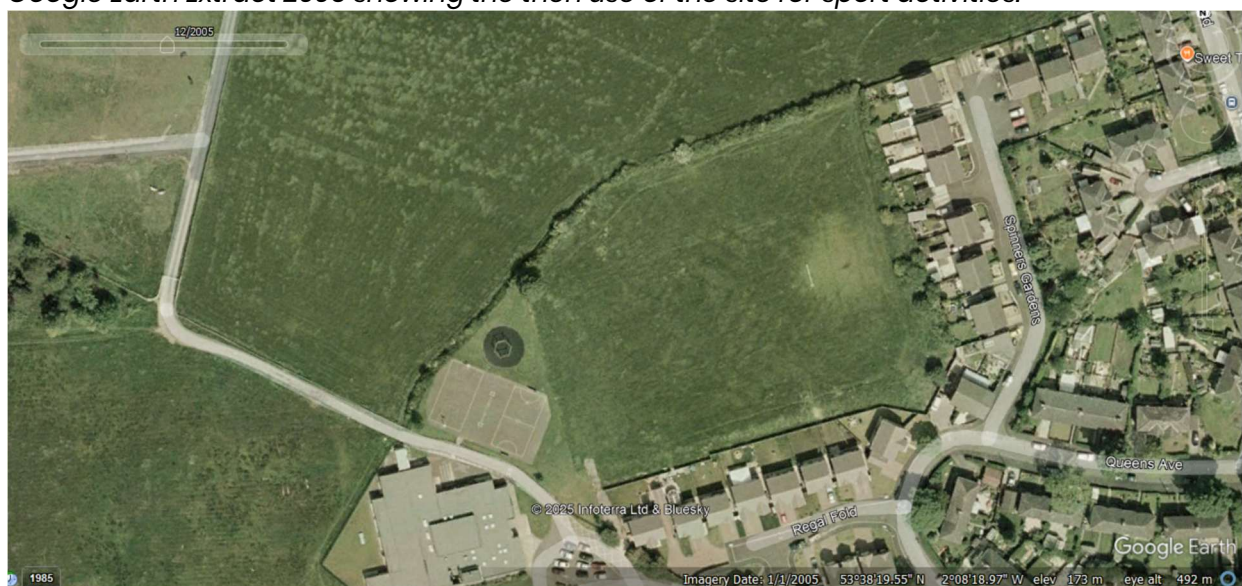
It is noted that although the natural turf area of the playing field appears not to have been used for some time, there is an existing macadam based MUGA which includes basketball and formerly has been marked out for netball and cricket.

Sport England does not support any reduction in playing field, including macadam playing field, where it has not been demonstrated that our Playing Field Policy has been met. This will need to include understanding the current Council's need for any facility which would be lost.

Google Earth Extract 2019 showing extent of the playing field as 1.12ha: (this includes the hardstanding area)



Google Earth Extract 2005 showing the then use of the site for sport activities:



On this basis, the location of the proposed temporary car park will result in the loss of the hardstanding area used for basketball; netball; and cricket. In addition, the proposal would temporarily limit access to the natural turf playing field.

Assessment against Sport England Policy

Sport England considers proposals affecting playing fields in light of its own Playing Fields Policy and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (in particular Para. 104). Our Policy states:

'Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of:

- all or any part of a playing field, or*
- land which has been used as a playing field and remains undeveloped, or*
- land allocated for use as a playing field*

unless, in the judgement of Sport England, the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions.'

E1: There is no evidence in Rochdale's Playing Pitch Strategy that there is a surplus of playing field land provision therefore Sport England Policy Exception E1 cannot be met. There is no available up to date needs assessment which would support the loss of the basketball and netball facility.

E2: Does not apply.

E3: Does not apply.

E4: Does apply , however no reprovision is presented.

E5: Does not apply as the proposal is related to the use of the school and not a sporting facility.

The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 104 states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

In this circumstance Paragraph 104 b) applies.

Consultation with the National Governing Bodies 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 and in relation to the submitted additional information, Sport England has consulted with the Football Foundation (FF); and Basketball England (BE); those responses received are summarised as follows:-

FF:

- *The area marked out does not encroach on an area strategically used for football. Goal posts were present in to the east in 2005 however it has not been present since and the land does appear to support active football usage. Car parking would likely support usage of the wider site through a more suitable parking area. FF has no comment to make.*

Sport England's Position

The proposal replaces an existing non-lit, macadam MUGA which is marked out and has facilities for basketball; netball; and cricket. The loss is presented as temporary, however the five year period is a significant period of time for this facility to be lost and there has been no demonstration as to how an alternative facility use will be provided throughout the temporary period, nor how it will be reinstated to Sport England standards following the school construction process.

The Football Foundation have indicated that there would be a benefit to the area being re-engineered to provide for parking to improve access for football use of the site. Whilst their views are noted, Sport England considers the use of playing field as a whole and not merely to facilitate single sport usage, particularly where there is an existing facility for other sports that would be impacted.

Rochdale does not have an up to date needs assessment which would demonstrate the need for basketball and netball, however Sport England is aware from previous engagement with National Governing Bodies that there is a need for both sports in this area. The applicant has not provided any demonstration of need that would support the loss of the facility.

Conclusion

Sport England currently **objects** to the proposal as it is considered that there is currently insufficient information in relation to the use of the re-provision of the existing macadam sports facility, either temporarily or permanently to assess whether the proposal meets any of the Exceptions of Sport England's Playing Field Policy, in particular E4 or meets the requirement of NPPF paragraph 104.

If the LPA is minded to approve the application contrary to Sport England's objection, the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2024 requires the application to be referred to the Secretary of State, via the National Planning Casework Unit.

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).

Please note that this response relates to Sport England's planning function only. It is not associated with our funding role or any grant application/award that may relate to the site.

Any further information should be submitted 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