



Planning Statement

Bowlee Football & Community Wellbeing Hub
Client: Rochdale Borough Council & Rochdale
Association Football Club



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Document Issue Sheet

Issue Nr.	Document	Status	Issue Date	Parties Sent To	Prepared By	Reviewed By
1.0	Planning Statement	FINAL	12/08/2026	RBC	AS/GB	KG



Introduction

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Enabl on behalf of the applicants, Rochdale Borough Council (RBC) and Rochdale Association Football Club (RAFC). The statement accompanies a planning application for the proposed development of a new Football and Community Wellbeing Hub in Bowlee, Middleton.
- 1.2 This statement sets out the conformity of the proposals with the development plan and relevant national policy, as well as any other material considerations having regard to Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Scheme Description

- 1.3 The submitted planning application is seeking planning consent for:

"Demolition and replacement of community centre to provide Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub (Hybrid Use Class F2/E(d)) comprising community sports and wellbeing facilities; football club training and community facilities; provision of artificial grass football pitches; enhancement and reprovision of existing grass football pitches; drainage and earthworks; provision of cricket nets; with associated hard and soft landscaping, parking, storage container, lighting, enclosures and boundary treatments."



Application Documents

1.4 This Planning Statement should be read alongside the Architectural plans / drawings and supporting documents submitted to accompany the planning application. The application documents comprise:

- Air Quality Assessment, prepared by Redmore Environmental;
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment, prepared by E3P;
- Bat Activity Survey Report (Interim), prepared by E3P;
- Bat Emergence Survey Report, prepared by E3P;
- Biodiversity Metric Report and Statutory Calculation Tool, prepared by E3P;
- Broadband Connectivity Assessment, prepared by GTech Surveys;
- Crime Impact Statement, prepared by Design for Security;
- Community Use Agreements (DRAFT for information), prepared by FMG;
- Design and Access Statement, prepared by Pozzoni Architecture;
- Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy, prepared by MAB Consultancy;
- Landscape Design and Access Statement, prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture;
- Landscape Summary, prepared by Re-form Landscape Architecture;
- Lighting Design & Planning Report, prepared by Kowski Consulting;
- Noise Impact Assessment, prepared by Jameson Acoustics;
- Phase 1 Desk Study Report, prepared by Clancy;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, prepared by E3P;
- Sports Impact Assessment, prepared by FMG;
- Statement of Community Involvement, prepared by Enabl;
- Transport Statement, prepared by i-Transport;
- Waste Management Strategy, prepared by Pozzoni Architecture and Modulek; and
- Planning Statement, prepared by Enabl (this document).



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Site and Surroundings

2. Site and Surroundings

The Site

- 2.1 The Site is located in Bowlee, north-west of Middleton. It is a 10.746ha area within the wider Bowlee Community Park bound by Heywood Old Road to the north-west, Edgar Wood Academy to the north-east, landscaped and wooded areas of the Park to the east, additional grassed open space to the south and a residential frontage to the south-west.
- 2.2 It comprises:
- Three areas of playing fields, currently used for outdoor sport and recreation purposes including football and cricket;
 - Bowlee Pavilion, a single-storey community building occupied by Bowlee Community Organisation;
 - A surface car park with approximately 50no. unmarked spaces, accessed via an existing access road off Heywood Old Road;
 - A small children's play area;
 - A number of mature trees, mainly along the north-western boundary and along the edges of the internal access road and car park; and
 - A section of footpath leading south from the Pavilion. The footpath extends beyond the Site boundary to the south and east.



Figure 1: Site Location



- 2.3 Vehicular access is via Heywood Old Road. Pedestrians and cyclists can also access the park via footpaths to the south and east.
- 2.4 The largest and smallest of the areas of open recreational space are marked out for football, with the remaining open space to the south-west of the car park used for cricket.

The Surroundings

- 2.5 Bowlee Community Park, which the Site forms a part of, is a 40ha public park accessed via Windermere Road, Martindale Crescent and Heywood Old Road. The park is a former RAF barrage balloon centre now providing a range of recreational, sporting and community facilities.
- 2.6 It is a mixed-use area with leisure, community, educational, residential, agricultural and commercial uses with and immediately surrounding the Site. To the south, the Park hosts Bowlee Car Boot Sale on Sundays and Bank Holidays from March – October.
- 2.7 Beyond the Park to the south and east are residential suburbs of Middleton. Middleton Town Centre is located approximately 2.2km to the south-east of the Site. The M62 motorway and Moto Birch motorway services are located beyond the agricultural land on the opposite side of Heywood Old Road.
- 2.8 The site benefits from a moderately accessible location, located in close proximity to the existing residential community at Langley. Heywood Old Road provides direct vehicular access and connects to the wider highway network serving Middleton, Heywood and Rochdale town centres. The surrounding area is well served by local bus routes, with stops located 10-minutes away along Heywood Old Road (north) and Windermere Road (southeast), offering sustainable travel options for staff, players and visitors.
- 2.9 Pedestrian and cycle connectivity is strong, with existing footpaths and shared routes within Bowlee Community Park linking the site to surrounding residential areas, the academy, and local community facilities.
- 2.10 According to the Department for Transport's Connectivity Tool Lite, the Site's Overall Connectivity (except driving) Score ranges from 52 to 59 across the Site's area, indicating a moderate level of connectivity and access to employment, services and facilities by sustainable modes of transport when compared with locations across England and Wales.
- 2.11 Bowlee Community Park is home to Bowlee Art Trail, a route comprising nineteen large stone boulders positioned along the main pedestrian routes within the Park. These boulders incorporate carved symbols reflecting the history and heritage of Middleton and contribute to the cultural and recreational value of the area.
- 2.12 Two large Places for Everyone Allocations are located in close proximity to the Site: JPA 1.1 Heywood / Pilsworth (Northern Gateway) (540m north-west), allocated for around 1,200,000 m² of industrial and warehousing space and 1,200 homes; and Simister and Bowlee (Northern Gateway) (850m southwest), allocated for 1,550 homes.

Site Designations

2.13 According to the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan Map, the site has the following designations:

- Protected Open Land (D/10);
- Protection of Existing Recreational Open Space (G/3);
- Greenspace Corridors (G/8);
- Recreational Rights of Way (RE/6) (along north-eastern and eastern boundaries and along footpath within Site); and
- Recreational Management Areas (RE/7(k)).

2.14 In addition, Heywood Old Road is designated as part of the Strategic Highway Network (A/24).

2.15 The land beyond Heywood Old Road is designated Green Belt.

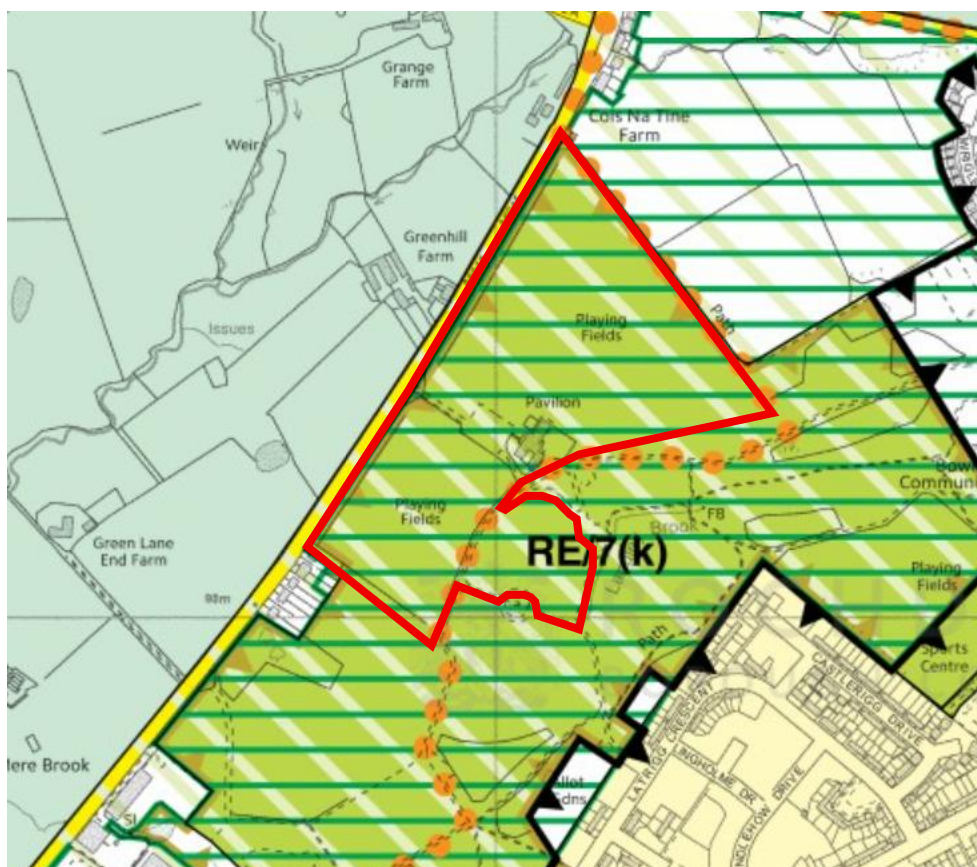


Figure 2: Site Designation Policy Map Extract (approximate site boundary overlaid in red)

2.16 There are no listed buildings within the Site or the wider Bowlee Community Park. The nearest listed buildings are Fountain Horse Trough to North of White Hart Inn (Grade II, 150m north) and Birch-in-Hopwood War Memorial (Grade II, 350m north).

2.17 The Site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at low risk of flooding from rivers. Environment Agency mapping identifies a small area of surface water flood risk adjacent to the existing site access.



Relevant Planning History

2.18 The most relevant planning history is summarised in the below table:

Reference	Address	Description	Decision
24/00949/DEM	Bowlee Bungalow Heywood Old Road Middleton M24 4SD	Prior approval for the demolition of single storey brick built building	Approve with Conditions 28/11/2024
21/00585/PRA56	Bowlee Playing Fields Heywood Old Road Middleton M24 4SD	Prior notification for the installation of a 22.44kwp Solar PV System on the pitched roofs of the changing pavilion	Prior Approval Not Required 20/7/2021
13/00805/OUT	Bowlee Playing Fields Heywood Old Road Middleton M24 4SD	Outline application for all matters reserved for the erection of a building to facilitate an archery range	Approve with Conditions 12/11/2013

Table 1: Planning History

2.19 The planning history demonstrates an established acceptance of sport, recreation and associated built development at the Site, including permission for an archery range building, rooftop solar infrastructure and the demolition of an existing building.



Proposed Development

3. Need for the Proposed Development

Strategic Context and Vision

- 3.1 The application is being brought forward jointly by Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC and reflects a long-term partnership to deliver the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. The proposals have evolved through feasibility work, sports planning assessments, stakeholder engagement, funding discussions, pre-application consultation and community engagement, with the shared objective of securing the long-term future of Bowlee as a strategic sports, recreation and wellbeing destination serving Middleton and the wider Rochdale Borough. The proposals have been developed collaboratively with input from Rochdale Borough Council, Rochdale AFC, Your Trust, the Football Foundation, Sport England, Lancashire County Football Association and Lancashire County Cricket Club.
- 3.2 The proposals do not seek to introduce an unrelated use onto the Site. Bowlee is already an established destination for sport, recreation and community activity. The application instead seeks to enhance, modernise and expand the existing sporting and recreational offer through significant investment in facilities, infrastructure and supporting community provision. The development should therefore be viewed as the enhancement and improvement of an existing recreational asset rather than the redevelopment of open space for an alternative purpose.

Need for Investment at Bowlee

- 3.3 Whilst Bowlee Playing Fields performs an existing role within the Borough's sporting infrastructure, the existing facilities are constrained by a number of physical and operational limitations. The submitted Rochdale Sports Statement, prepared by FMG, records that the Site currently includes seven grass football pitches, a non-turf cricket wicket and an existing pavilion, but that only four grass pitches are in regular use because three are affected by drainage problems. The remaining pitches are also subject to poor weather disruption and match cancellations.
- 3.4 The existing Bowlee Pavilion similarly no longer provides accommodation capable of supporting the role the Site is expected to perform as a major community sports destination. The Sports Statement identifies the existing pavilion as limited and requiring significant updating or replacement. The proposals therefore respond directly to existing deficiencies in pitch quality, drainage, reliability and ancillary accommodation.
- 3.5 The Rochdale Playing Pitch Strategy 2016-2026 provides the strategic starting point for investment in the Borough's pitch sport infrastructure. It identifies football as the Borough's largest pitch sport and identifies Bowlee Playing Fields as one of Rochdale's strategic sports hub locations. The submitted Sports Statement builds on this position and provides the more up-to-date and site-specific assessment of need, including evidence from the FMG Feasibility Study, the Local Football Facilities Plan and targeted football stakeholder engagement.

Proposed Location- Strategic Fit

- 3.6 Bowlee has been selected as the preferred location because it is already an established playing field site with the scale, location and strategic role required to accommodate a comprehensive football and community wellbeing hub. The Site contains an existing cluster of football and cricket provision, has established community use, sits close to residential communities and has sufficient land to accommodate enhanced community sports provision, Rochdale AFC facilities, supporting buildings, parking, drainage and landscape infrastructure within a coordinated masterplan.
- 3.7 The submitted Sports Statement identifies Bowlee as a site with significant strategic potential, but one which currently underperforms because of drainage limitations, pitch quality constraints and ageing ancillary facilities. The proposals therefore do not seek to move sport away from the Site or replace it with an unrelated use. Instead, they seek to retain sport at Bowlee while significantly improving its quality, capacity, reliability and long-term sustainability.

Evidence of Demand

- 3.8 The need for additional 3G capacity is clearly evidenced within the submitted Sports Statement. The Sports Statement explains that the need for Bowlee is not simply about replacing grass pitches with 3G surfaces, but about providing reliable, year-round, higher-capacity football facilities capable of supporting training, match play and future growth. It refers to the FMG Feasibility Study, which identified a shortfall of 3 to 4 full-size 3G AGPs, with only five pitches having confirmed community access and only four being on the FA register.
- 3.9 The Sports Statement also identifies substantial existing and future demand. Consultation responses represented around 194 existing teams, with potential growth to approximately 392 teams, equivalent to a 102% increase, mainly across mini and youth football, with future growth also expected in women's, girls' and disability football. The Sports Statement records existing unmet demand, with thirteen clubs reporting unmet need, fourteen clubs reporting that players already travel 15 minutes or more to train, twelve clubs wanting to increase 3G training use at Council venues and eleven clubs wanting to increase 3G match use.
- 3.10 The Local Football Facilities Plan, published in January 2025, provides further evidence of need. The Sports Statement records that the LFFP identified 462 affiliated teams in Rochdale and a shortfall of seven full-size pitches across the Borough, including shortfalls in Heywood, Pennines and Rochdale analysis areas. The LFFP also identifies that, of nine existing full-size 3G pitches, eight are available to the community and only four are available on the 3G pitch match play register.

Benefits the Scheme Seeks to Unlock

- 3.11 The proposed development seeks to unlock a substantial package of sporting and community benefits by transforming Bowlee from a constrained and underperforming facility into a managed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. The scheme will retain sport on the Site while substantially improving its quality, capacity and resilience through three full-size 3G pitches, retained and improved grass pitch provision, cricket reprovision, modern changing accommodation, a community sports pavilion, a 40-station health and

fitness gym, community space and supporting infrastructure. The Sports Statement notes that a properly maintained AGP can sustain up to 80 hours of use per week, providing an average of around 1,400 playing opportunities.

- 3.12 The proposals will therefore deliver more than a replacement of existing facilities. They will address identified deficiencies in local sports infrastructure, improve the reliability of football provision, reduce weather-related cancellations, increase year-round capacity, support grassroots clubs, schools and leagues, provide opportunities for women and girls, disabled players, young people and underrepresented groups, retain cricket provision and create a more sustainable operating model for community sport. The scheme also provides a permanent base for Rochdale AFC community activity while ensuring that community access remains central to the hub's operation.
- 3.13 Overall, the development represents an evidence-led investment in an existing recreational asset. It responds directly to identified local and strategic need, while securing long-term sporting, health, wellbeing and community benefits for Bowlee, Middleton Township and the wider Rochdale catchment.

The Concept and Proposed Development

- 3.14 Planning permission is sought for the comprehensive redevelopment and enhancement of the existing sporting and recreational facilities at Bowlee to create the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. The application is being brought forward jointly by Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC and reflects a shared ambition to deliver a high-quality sporting, recreation and wellbeing destination serving Middleton and the wider Rochdale Borough.
- 3.15 The scheme being brought forward comprises:
- Demolition and replacement of community centre to provide Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub (Hybrid Use Class F2/E(d)) comprising community sports and wellbeing facilities; football club training and community facilities; provision of artificial grass football pitches; enhancement and reprovision of existing grass football pitches; drainage and earthworks; provision of cricket nets; with associated hard and soft landscaping, parking, storage container, lighting, enclosures and boundary treatments.*
- 3.16 The proposals comprise a significant programme of investment in existing sporting infrastructure at Bowlee, bringing together enhanced football and cricket provision, community sports facilities, health and wellbeing uses, community activity and Rochdale AFC operations within a coordinated masterplan. The development has been designed to improve the quality, capacity, accessibility and long-term sustainability of facilities available at the Site, creating a modern hub capable of serving a broad range of users throughout the year.
- 3.17 The project has evolved through a collaborative partnership involving Rochdale Borough Council, Rochdale AFC, Your Trust and a range of specialist sporting, planning and technical advisors. The shared vision is to establish Bowlee as a strategic Football and Community Wellbeing Hub, providing high-quality facilities for community sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing initiatives, grassroots football, community programmes and elite training activity.

- 3.18 It should be noted that the Proposed Development does not alter the existing access from Heywood Old Road, utilising the existing vehicle access junction with no alterations. Also important to note is that the proposed RAFC facility is for training and community purposes only, with no First Team sporting fixtures that would attract spectators.

The Proposed Hub

- 3.19 The proposed Community and Wellbeing Hub will remain under Council ownership and replace the existing pavilion building. The facility will provide modern changing accommodation for community sport, a 40-station health and fitness gym, community meeting space, café facilities, storage areas, accessible facilities and ancillary accommodation. The building is intended to support a wide range of sporting, community and wellbeing activities and provide a significantly enhanced community facility for existing and future users.
- 3.20 Rochdale AFC proposes a dedicated training and community facility which will establish a permanent long-term base for both football operations and community programmes delivered by Rochdale AFC and Rochdale AFC Community Trust. The building will include changing accommodation, welfare and recovery facilities, administration space, social areas and a flexible community function room overlooking the pitches and wider parkland.
- 3.21 Together, the Council and Rochdale AFC elements of the scheme have been designed as a genuinely integrated sporting and community destination. The proposals seek not only to improve sporting facilities, but also to broaden opportunities for participation in physical activity, enhance community infrastructure and create a sustainable long-term future for Bowlee as a major sporting and wellbeing asset for the Borough.

Partnership and Delivery

- 3.22 The application has been submitted jointly by Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC and reflects a shared commitment to delivering the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. Whilst the development is anticipated to be delivered in phases reflecting funding and delivery arrangements, the proposals form part of a single coordinated vision for the future of the Site and should be considered as one comprehensive, holistic development.
- 3.23 The anticipated delivery programme currently envisages three phases of development, to be brought forward separately by Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council. The phased approach reflects the partnership nature of the project and provides each organisation with flexibility over funding, approvals, procurement and delivery. It is not anticipated that significant gaps will arise between the implementation of the various phases. Upon completion, the Council-operated facilities and Rochdale AFC facilities will continue to operate independently in accordance with their respective ownership, management and community access arrangements, whilst collectively forming part of the wider Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub.
- Phase 1 – site clearance, demolition of the existing Council pavilion, earthworks and formation of principal hardstanding and parking areas;

- Phase 2 – delivery of the Rochdale AFC facilities, including drainage infrastructure, attenuation features, pitches and clubhouse building; and
- Phase 3 – delivery of the Council-operated Community and Wellbeing Hub, community sports pitches and completion of the wider parking, landscaping and public realm works.

3.24 In parallel with the development of the proposals, Rochdale Borough Council is working proactively with existing occupiers and users of Bowlee Pavilion to identify suitable temporary and long-term accommodation arrangements. Existing user groups will be able to continue operating from alternative premises during redevelopment and will have the opportunity to occupy or utilise facilities within the replacement Community and Wellbeing Hub once completed. FMG Consulting is also undertaking ongoing engagement with existing clubs, leagues, schools, community organisations and future occupiers to refine programming, access arrangements and future operational requirements, ensuring that the completed development responds to identified demand and supports a broad range of community, sporting and wellbeing activities.

Proposed Use

- 3.25 Bowlee is an established sporting and community destination comprising playing fields, a community pavilion, a children's play area and associated recreational infrastructure. The Site is currently used for a range of sporting, community and recreational activities centred around football, cricket and wider community use. The existing Bowlee Pavilion, operated by Bowlee Community Organisation, provides changing accommodation and community facilities supporting the sporting function of the Site, whilst the surrounding playing fields accommodate formal and informal sporting activity throughout the year.
- 3.26 The proposed development seeks to retain and significantly enhance this established sporting and community role. The development has been conceived as the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub, providing a coordinated range of facilities that support community sport, health and wellbeing activities, football training and competition, community programmes, fitness activities and wider recreational use. The proposals therefore represent an evolution and enhancement of the Site's existing function rather than a fundamental change in how the Site operates.
- 3.27 During the pre-application process, consideration was given to the most appropriate planning use class for the proposed development. The existing playing fields and outdoor sporting facilities fall within Use Class F2(c) (outdoor sport and recreation), whilst the existing pavilion performs functions consistent with community uses falling within Use Class F2(b) (community halls and meeting places). The proposed development retains these established sporting and community functions whilst significantly expanding the range and quality of facilities available.
- 3.28 The replacement Community and Wellbeing Hub will accommodate changing facilities, community space, a café, health and fitness facilities and associated supporting accommodation. The Rochdale AFC facility will similarly provide changing accommodation, community function space, sports-related welfare facilities, administration space and ancillary training facilities alongside the outdoor sporting provision. The proposed buildings therefore perform both sporting and community functions and incorporate elements of indoor sport and recreation alongside community uses.



- 3.29 The proposed development is therefore appropriately described as a hybrid F2/E(d) development. The outdoor football and cricket facilities remain within the established sporting and recreational use of the Site, whilst the proposed buildings combine community, sport, recreation, health and wellbeing functions. The development has been intentionally designed to support a broad spectrum of sporting, recreational and community activities, creating a flexible and inclusive destination capable of serving a diverse range of users throughout the day and week.
- 3.30 Whilst the Site will contain distinct Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council/community areas, the development has been conceived as a coordinated sporting and community hub. The Council facilities will support wider community sport, health and wellbeing activities, whilst the Rochdale AFC facilities will support football operations together with community delivery through Rochdale AFC Community Trust. Community access will remain a central component of the overall development and will be secured through separate management arrangements and community use agreements associated with the respective facilities.
- 3.31 The proposed facilities will be arranged across distinct Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council/community areas, whilst incorporating a number of shared infrastructure and supporting elements. The distribution of uses is summarised in Table 2 below.

Existing Facilities on Site	
Playing field use including grass football pitches, cricket pitch	Existing Bowlee Community Pavilion building, play area, car park,
Proposed Facilities on Site	
RBC Community Use	RAFC and RAFC Community Trust Use
Two full-size floodlit community 3G Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs)	One full-size floodlit 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) for Rochdale AFC Community Trust and community programmes
Retained and enhanced community grass football pitches (two Adult 11v11, one Youth 11v11 and one Mini 5v5 pitch)	One full-size grass training pitch
Two-bay enclosed non-turf cricket practice facility	Rochdale AFC clubhouse and training facility incorporating changing accommodation, welfare and recovery facilities, offices, meeting space and community function space
Retained children's play area	Ancillary external storage unit relating to pitches

Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub incorporating: • Four football team changing rooms and officials' facilities • 40-station health and fitness gym • Community room and meeting facilities • Café and social space • Storage and ancillary accommodation	
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Table 2: Proposed Facilities Distribution on Site

Quantum of Development

- 3.32 The proposed development will replace the existing Bowlee Pavilion and associated ancillary structures with a comprehensive range of new sporting, community and wellbeing facilities. The principal physical changes comprise the construction of the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub, the Rochdale AFC training and community facility, enhanced sports pitches, associated engineering works, parking, landscaping and supporting infrastructure.
- 3.33 The proposed development will provide approximately 1,192sqm of new floorspace across the Site in the form of the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub and Rochdale AFC training and community facilities. Whilst this represents an increase in built floorspace compared to the existing arrangements, the overall quantum of development remains modest in the context of the wider 10.746ha Site, with the vast majority of the land retained for sporting, recreational and landscaped purposes.
- 3.34 The proposed buildings have been carefully positioned within the existing developed core of the Site and informed by the topography, landscape structure and operational requirements of Bowlee. The concentration of built form around the existing access and pavilion area limits encroachment into the wider playing fields and helps minimise visual impacts, whilst providing the accommodation necessary to support the enhanced sporting, community, health and wellbeing functions proposed as part of the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub.

Layout and Design

- 3.35 The site layout has been informed by the operational requirements of Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council, whilst recognising the shared ambition to create the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. Rochdale AFC's facilities are located within the south-western part of the Site, whilst the Council-operated sports and community facilities are positioned within the north-eastern section. A central area of shared infrastructure provides parking, access, circulation, drainage and servicing functions, allowing the respective facilities to operate independently whilst contributing to a coordinated sporting and community

destination.

- 3.36 The indicative site distribution can be seen in the plan below showing the broad site management, though it should be noted that this does not represent a fixed operational or delivery phasing plan.:

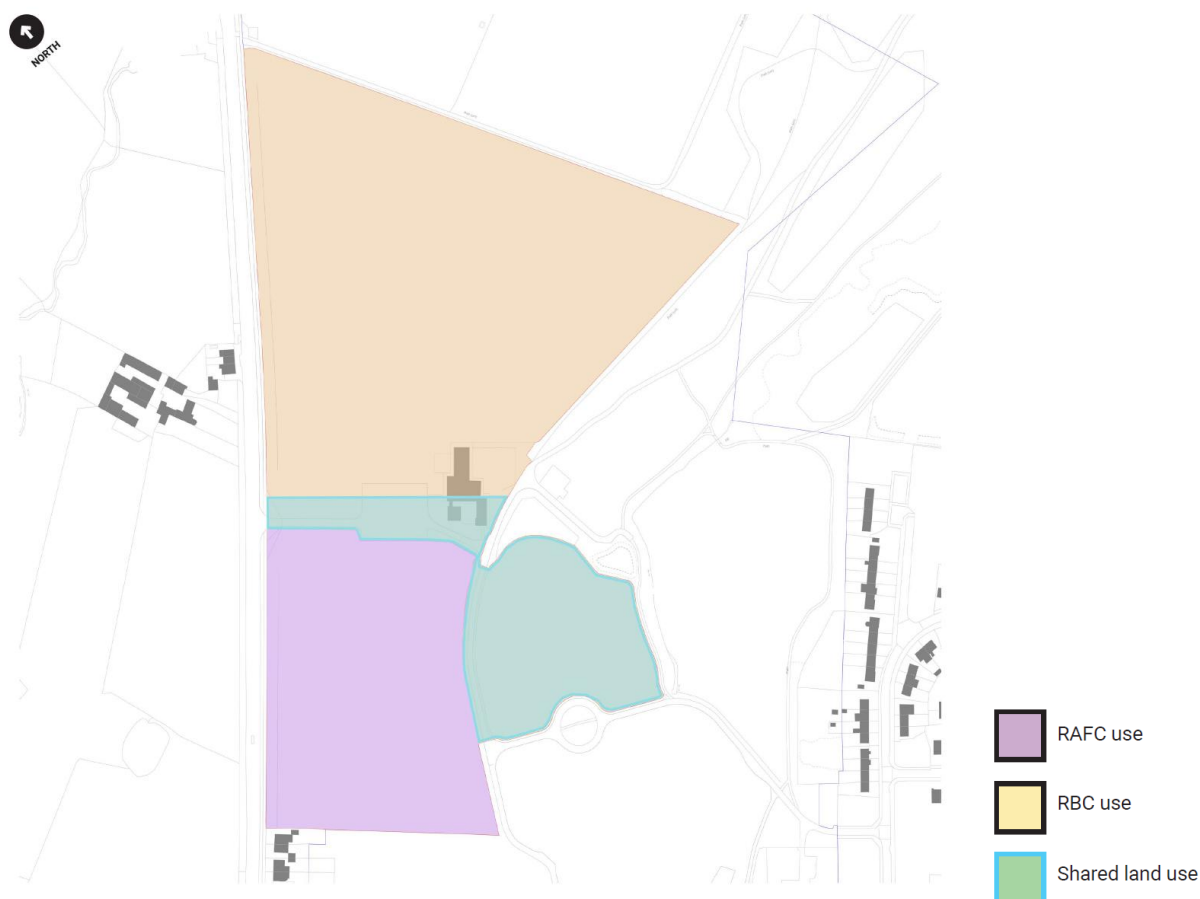


Figure 3: Proposed Distribution of Site Uses

- 3.37 The site layout has been informed by the existing topography, landscape structure, access arrangements and operational requirements of both Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council. Rochdale AFC's facilities are positioned within the south-western part of the Site, whilst the Council-operated sports and community facilities are located within the north-eastern section. Between these areas, a central shared zone accommodates parking, access, circulation, drainage infrastructure and supporting facilities, enabling the efficient operation of the development whilst contributing towards the wider vision of the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub.
- 3.38 The arrangement of development responds positively to the existing site access and infrastructure network. No new vehicular access is proposed and the development continues to utilise the established access from Heywood Old Road. Both principal buildings are reached via this existing route, with parking consolidated around the central arrival area to provide convenient access to both Rochdale AFC and community facilities while minimising the spread of hardstanding across the wider Site.



- 3.39 Existing pedestrian routes and desire lines have informed the site layout. Public access through Bowlee Community Park is retained, with routes enhanced where appropriate to maintain permeability and preserve connections between the wider park, surrounding residential areas and Heywood Old Road. Cycle parking and pedestrian infrastructure are integrated within the wider access strategy.
- 3.40 The proposals include significant ground modelling, site levelling and drainage improvements to create a more usable and reliable sports facility. Existing pitch levels will be rationalised and modern drainage infrastructure introduced to improve the quality, capacity and year-round usability of sporting provision. These engineering works form a fundamental part of the strategy to address the longstanding drainage constraints affecting the Site.
- 3.41 Whilst the Site contains distinct Rochdale AFC and Council-operated areas, the layout has been designed to create a coherent sporting and community destination. Shared arrival spaces, circulation routes, parking areas and supporting infrastructure allow the facilities to function in a complementary manner whilst retaining separate ownership, management and community access arrangements. The indicative site distribution can be seen in the plan below, though it should be noted that this does not represent a fixed operational or delivery phasing plan.
- 3.42 The Council and community zone incorporates retained and enhanced grass football pitches, additional community football provision, two new community 3G pitches, replacement cricket facilities, the retained children's play area and the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub. The Hub is positioned adjacent to the principal community sports facilities and supported by spectator areas, social spaces and landscaped public realm, creating a focal point for community sport, health and wellbeing activities. Land has also been safeguarded to provide flexibility for the future evolution of cricket provision should demand arise.
- 3.43 The Rochdale AFC zone comprises a full-size 3G pitch, an 11v11 grass training pitch and the new Rochdale AFC clubhouse and training facility. The building has been positioned at pitch level, utilising the site's existing landform to reduce its apparent scale when viewed from across the wider Site. This approach allows the development to accommodate the operational requirements of a two-storey facility whilst minimising its visual impact within the wider parkland setting. Access from the central arrival area is provided via a combination of ramps and steps which respond to the site's existing levels and ensure appropriate connectivity between the various parts of the development.
- 3.44 The proposals include significant ground modelling, reprofiling and drainage improvements to create a more usable and reliable sports facility. Existing pitch levels will be rationalised and modern drainage infrastructure introduced to improve the quality, capacity and year-round usability of sporting provision. These engineering works form a fundamental part of the strategy to address the longstanding drainage constraints affecting the Site. The earthworks have been designed to achieve a balanced approach across the Site, reducing the need for material export whilst creating landforms that integrate positively with the wider landscape strategy.
- 3.45 In addition to the principal buildings and sports facilities, the development incorporates a range of supporting infrastructure including sports lighting, fencing, boundary treatments, hardstanding areas, drainage features, cycle parking, seating, spectator areas and associated site furniture. The detailed design of these elements

will continue to evolve in response to the operational requirements of the respective operators, whilst ensuring an appropriate and coordinated response to landscape, visual amenity, ecology, accessibility and site management considerations.



Figure 4: Landscape Plan

Internal Layout

3.46 The internal layout mainly concerns the layout of the two buildings on site as detailed below.

The Community and Wellbeing Hub

3.47 The Community and Wellbeing Hub has been carefully designed to replace the existing pavilion, and provide a modern, accessible and flexible facility on site.

3.48 The building layout has been arranged to maximise activity and natural surveillance, with the principal entrance clearly defined through the use of a covered arrival space. Large areas of floor-to-ceiling glazing allow key internal functions, including the café, community rooms and fitness suite, to be visible from surrounding public areas, creating an active and welcoming frontage.

3.49 A generous entrance lobby leads to a central reception area with associated office space, from which point visitors can access the principal facilities within the building. Changing areas (including group change and officials changing rooms) and fitness suite users are looked over by reception for safety and security (each door with access control), whilst all visitors have access to the pitches and café / community spaces and



public toilets.

- 3.50 A central reception and entrance lobby form the heart of the building, providing clear wayfinding and direct access to all principal facilities. Staff have visibility over the main changing and fitness areas, assisting the safe and secure operation of the building.
- 3.51 The café and kitchen facilities have been designed to support a variety of user groups and operational requirements, including service provision to building users, spectators and visitors to the adjacent play area. On quieter days, reception staff can have access to the kitchen via the office.
- 3.52 The fitness suite extends to approximately 160m² and is capable of accommodating up to 40 exercise stations. The fitness suite extends to approximately 160m² and is capable of accommodating up to 40 exercise stations. The space benefits from natural daylight and external views through glazing on two elevations.
- 3.53 Sports changing provision comprises 4no. group changing rooms, 2no. officials changing rooms, an all-gender changing facility, a fully accessible changing room and additional toilet. Each team changing room is designed to accommodate team and matchday requirements and includes changing benches, showers, sanitary facilities and private changing cubicles.
- 3.54 Lockers are positioned within the central circulation space, improving operational flexibility and enabling changing rooms to accommodate a range of users throughout the day.
- 3.55 Plant rooms and storage facilities are accessed externally and provide the operational, servicing and maintenance functions necessary to support the day-to-day operation of the building.

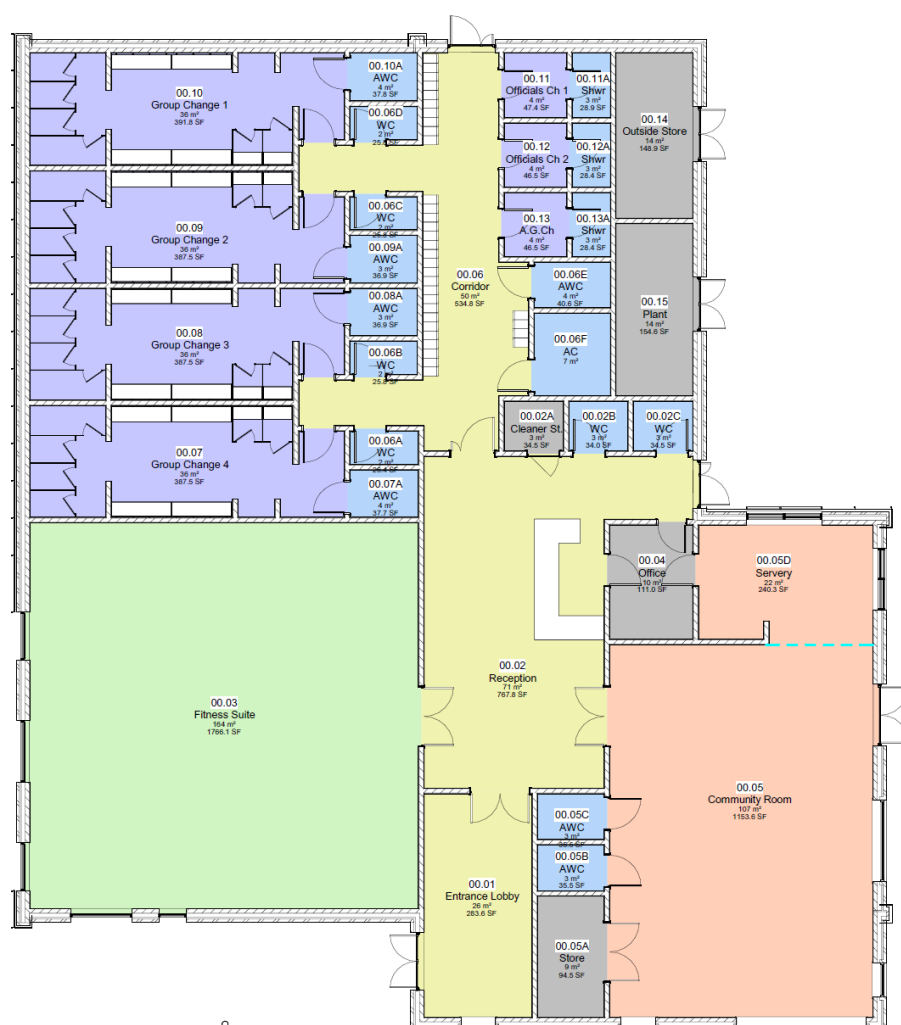


Figure 5: Community and Wellbeing Hub Ground Floor Plan

Materiality

- 3.56 The architectural approach to the Community and Wellbeing Hub seeks to create a welcoming, durable and high-quality building that responds positively to its parkland setting.
- 3.57 Given its prominent position within the site, the building's external treatment has been designed to present an attractive appearance from all directions, with the principal entrance clearly expressed through a projecting canopy.
- 3.58 The material palette has been selected to provide durability, longevity and visual warmth. The building incorporates standing seam metal cladding in RAL 7005, a combination of red and brown brickwork, and aluminium detailing. The use of pitched roof forms and a restrained palette of materials help to break up the building mass and create a scale more closely aligned with the surrounding park environment.



Figure 6: Community and Wellbeing Hub Building

RAFC Clubhouse

3.59 The proposed building has been designed as a modular two-storey facility providing a combination of first-team training facilities, community facilities and supporting administration space. The modular approach enables efficient construction whilst delivering a high-quality permanent building tailored to the operational requirements of Rochdale AFC. The internal layout has been planned to clearly separate operational football functions from community and office uses, whilst maintaining strong internal connectivity through the central staircases and lift core.

Ground Floor

3.60 The ground floor primarily accommodates the player welfare, training and community support facilities. The principal accommodation includes a large first-team changing room, together with associated recovery and



welfare facilities including ice baths, shower and WC facilities, boot storage and kit storage. A dedicated therapy/medical room is also provided to support player treatment and rehabilitation.

- 3.61 Training-related functions are further supported by a centrally located gymnasium and a media/analysis room. Staff changing facilities are incorporated within the layout, ensuring appropriate provision for coaching and support personnel.
- 3.62 Alongside the professional football facilities, the building also provides three community team changing rooms, enabling wider community use of the development. Accessible WC facilities and ancillary storage areas are distributed throughout the floor to ensure inclusive access and efficient day-to-day operation.
- 3.63 A central circulation area containing staircases and a lift provides access to the first floor, ensuring the building is fully accessible.

First Floor

- 3.64 The first floor is focused on administration, community and social facilities. A large community function space occupies a significant portion of the floor, providing flexible accommodation for meetings, events, education initiatives and wider community activities. This space is supported by a kitchen and serving areas, together with associated ancillary storage.
- 3.65 A dining area and lounge are provided for players, staff and visitors, with a protein and nutrition bar serving the welfare requirements of the first team. External balconies adjoining the lounge and function space provide additional amenity space and opportunities for informal gatherings.
- 3.66 The office accommodation comprises a community office, first-team office/meeting room, manager and assistant's office, and coaches/analysts' office. These spaces provide the administrative and operational support required for the day-to-day management of the football club and its community programmes.
- 3.67 Additional facilities on the first floor include accessible WCs, staff welfare areas, cleaning/storage rooms and a plant room accommodating building services.

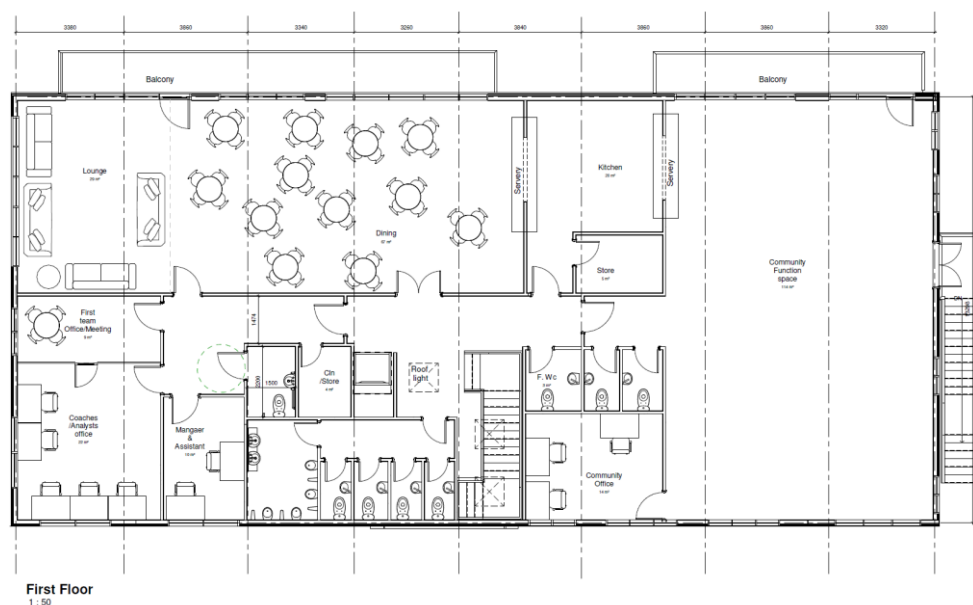
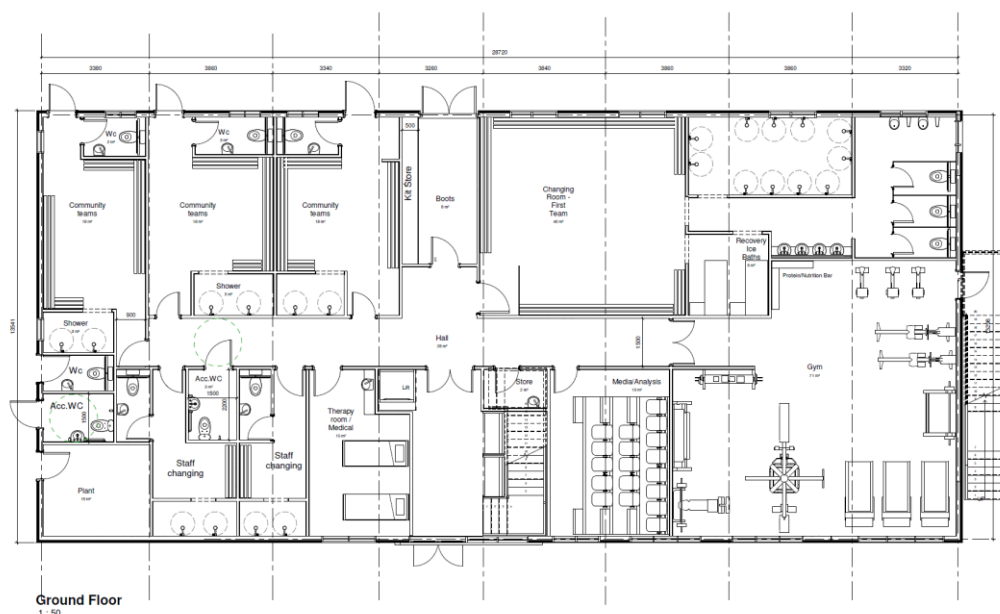


Figure 7: RAFC Clubhouse Plans

Materiality

- 3.68 The Rochdale AFC clubhouse adopts a contemporary architectural approach, with timber cladding forming the principal external material. The use of timber assists in integrating the building into its landscape setting whilst providing a sustainable and visually distinctive appearance.
- 3.69 Elements of Rochdale AFC's identity have been incorporated into the architectural treatment of the building through colour, detailing and branding cues, reinforcing its role as the Club's operational base whilst maintaining a high-quality appearance appropriate to the wider parkland setting.



Access and Parking

Site Access and Movement

- 3.70 Vehicular access to the site will continue to be taken from Heywood Old Road via the existing access point. The access has sufficient width to accommodate two-way vehicle movements and will continue to operate safely and efficiently.
- 3.71 The proposals retain and enhance access for pedestrians and cyclists through the wider Country Park, ensuring the development remains well connected to existing active travel routes.
- 3.72 A dedicated pedestrian and cycle access is also proposed from Heywood Old Road, reducing potential conflict with vehicles and improving accessibility for non-car users.
- 3.73 Internal pedestrian routes will generally provide a minimum width of 2 metres, with clearly identified crossing points incorporated where routes intersect with vehicle movements.

Service Vehicle Access

- 3.74 The development has been designed to accommodate servicing, maintenance and refuse collection requirements associated with the proposed uses.
- 3.75 A circulation route through the central parking area enables servicing vehicles to safely manoeuvre within the site without impacting on the operation of the sports facilities.
- 3.76 Existing maintenance access routes serving the pitches and wider Community Park will be retained, ensuring continued access for grounds maintenance operations.
- 3.77 The parking layout also provides flexibility for occasional maintenance and operational vehicles whilst maintaining safe and efficient operation of the site.

Cycle / Motorcycle Parking Provision

- 3.78 Cycle parking has been designed in accordance with Rochdale Borough Council guidance and will provide 20no. secure cycle parking spaces across the development. It is centrally located adjacent to the Community and Wellbeing Hub and shared facilities area, ensuring convenient access for staff, visitors and site users.
- 3.79 Additional areas have been identified and safeguarded to accommodate additional cycle parking should future demand increase.
- 3.80 Dedicated motorcycle parking will also be provided within a clearly identified location within the site.
- 3.81 The proposed provision supports sustainable travel choices and encourages greater use of active travel modes.

Car Parking Provision

- 3.82 The development will provide approximately 250no. car parking spaces, including 14no. accessible bays located in close proximity to the principal building entrances. Electric vehicle charging infrastructure will be

incorporated within approximately 10% of spaces.

- 3.83 The level of parking provision has been informed by the anticipated operational requirements of the development and is considered sufficient to accommodate forecast demand.
- 3.84 Appropriate signage, road markings and a clear internal circulation strategy will be provided throughout the car park to ensure safe vehicle movement, effective space management and the minimisation of potential user conflicts.

Landscaping

- 3.85 The parking, access arrangements and public realm have been designed alongside a comprehensive landscape strategy which seeks to strengthen the Site's parkland character, introduce new planting and biodiversity enhancements, and ensure the development integrates positively within the wider Bowlee Community Park. Existing landscape features and retained vegetation help define the structure of the development and soften the relationship between built form, parking and the surrounding open spaces. As part of this approach, new landscape bunding will be created using material arising from the reprofiling works. The bunding provides a sustainable means of accommodating site earthworks whilst also contributing to visual screening, landscape integration and the delivery of biodiversity net gain through the creation of new habitat areas and ecological enhancements.
- 3.86 The Rochdale AFC zone comprises a full-size 3G pitch, an 11v11 grass training pitch and the new Rochdale AFC clubhouse and training facility. The building has been positioned at pitch level, utilising the site's existing landform and proposed reprofiling works to reduce its apparent scale when viewed from across the wider Site. This approach allows the development to accommodate the operational requirements of a two-storey facility whilst minimising its visual prominence within the wider parkland setting. Access from the central arrival area is provided via a combination of ramps and steps that respond to the site's levels and ensure appropriate connectivity between the various parts of the development.
- 3.87 The proposed landscape strategy will deliver a high-quality, resilient and biodiverse environment that enhances the site's visual appearance, ecological value and recreational function. The scheme incorporates a diverse range of planting typologies, including species-rich grassland, wildflower meadows, ornamental planting, rain gardens, scrub and hedge planting, creating a varied and attractive landscape with year-round interest.
- 3.88 A total of 66no. new trees are proposed across the site, comprising a mix of native and ornamental species including alder, river and silver birch, hawthorn, hazel, beech, rowan and white willow. Existing trees will be retained where possible, helping to reinforce landscape character and provide continuity with the surrounding environment.
- 3.89 The planting strategy has been developed to enhance biodiversity through the introduction of over 14,000m² of species-rich grassland, approximately 4,200m² of species-rich grass and wildflower planting, and areas of marginal and aquatic planting associated with water features. These habitats will support pollinators and other wildlife while contributing to the wider green infrastructure network.



- 3.90 Sustainable drainage is integrated into the landscape design through the provision of rain gardens and attenuation ponds, which will assist in the management of surface water runoff while providing additional visual interest and ecological benefits. New shrub, ornamental and hedgerow planting will further strengthen the site's landscape structure, define key spaces and routes, and create an attractive setting for users, while softening the interface between the sports facilities and surrounding open countryside.
- 3.91 Proposed boundary treatments, including fencing allow the management of the training areas and help prevent unauthorised use of artificial pitches, while maintaining an open, green character through sensitive positioning and landscape screening.
- 3.92 Overall, the landscape strategy seeks to create a vibrant and welcoming environment that balances recreation, biodiversity enhancement and climate resilience, while providing a strong sense of place and supporting long-term landscape quality.
- 3.93 The parking, access arrangements and public realm have been designed alongside a comprehensive landscape strategy which seeks to strengthen the site's parkland character, introduce new planting and biodiversity enhancements, and ensure the development integrates positively within the wider Bowlee Community Park. Existing landscape features and retained vegetation help define the structure of the development and soften the relationship between built form, parking and the surrounding open spaces. As part of this approach, new landscape bunding will be created using material arising from the reprofiling works. The bunding provides a sustainable means of accommodating site earthworks whilst also contributing to visual screening, landscape integration and the delivery of biodiversity net gain through the creation of new habitat areas and ecological enhancements. The landscape strategy also seeks to cluster areas of built development, parking and associated infrastructure around the existing access corridor and activity nodes, allowing the wider Site to remain predominantly open in character and reinforcing the established parkland setting.



Figure 8: Landscaping Proposals

Waste

The Community and Wellbeing Hub

- 3.94 A comprehensive waste management strategy has been developed for the proposed Community and Wellbeing Hub in accordance with the requirements of Part H6 of the Building Regulations 2010 and BS 5906:2005 *Waste Management in Buildings – Code of Practice*. The strategy ensures that waste can be stored, segregated and collected in a safe, efficient and sustainable manner.
- 3.95 The proposed development has been designed to minimise operational waste generation and support the Council's wider sustainability objectives. Waste reduction, reuse and recycling principles will be embedded within the operation of the facility, helping to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill over the lifetime of the development.
- 3.96 The primary waste streams generated by the building are anticipated to comprise general waste, paper and cardboard, plastics, metals, glass, food waste and batteries. Appropriate facilities will be provided to enable the segregation and recycling of these materials prior to collection.
- 3.97 Dedicated waste and recycling storage areas will be incorporated within the development, providing sufficient capacity to accommodate the anticipated levels of waste generated by the facility. The storage arrangements have been designed to support the separate collection of recyclable materials, including paper and cardboard, mixed recyclables and food waste.

3.98 The refuse strategy has been developed in accordance with Rochdale Borough Council's collection requirements and incorporates a number of key design principles, including:

- Safe and convenient access to refuse storage areas for building users and collection operatives;
- Segregated storage of recyclable and non-recyclable waste streams;
- Refuse storage located at ground floor level with level access;
- Refuse collection routes free from steps and excessive gradients;
- Appropriate dropped kerbs and crossover arrangements where required;
- Sufficient space for the manoeuvring and collection of refuse containers;
- Internal access roads and hardstanding areas designed to accommodate waste collection vehicles; and
- Collection arrangements that minimise disruption to the operation of the site and surrounding users.

3.99 Overall, the proposed waste management arrangements will ensure that refuse and recycling can be managed effectively, supporting the long-term operation of the facility whilst promoting sustainable waste management practices.

RAFC Clubhouse

3.100 A dedicated refuse and recycling strategy has been prepared for the Rochdale AFC clubhouse, demonstrating that the building can be serviced safely and efficiently whilst supporting sustainable waste management practices.

3.101 The clubhouse is expected to generate a range of waste streams associated with its operation, including general waste, mixed recycling, cardboard, food waste and clinical waste arising from the proposed medical and therapy facilities. Clinical waste will be stored separately and collected by a licensed specialist contractor.

3.102 A purpose-built external refuse enclosure is proposed adjacent to the western elevation of the building. The enclosure measures approximately 4.6m by 3.0m and provides capacity for segregated waste and recycling containers, including general waste, mixed recycling, cardboard, food waste and clinical waste bins. The store will be enclosed by secure fencing with lockable gates, level access and a durable, washable surface with appropriate drainage.

3.103 Waste generated within the clubhouse will be segregated internally before being transferred to the refuse store by site staff. General waste, recycling and food waste will be collected by a licensed commercial contractor, whilst clinical waste will be managed separately in accordance with relevant environmental and healthcare regulations.

3.104 The designated collection point is located immediately adjacent to the refuse store on the site's internal access road. This arrangement allows collection vehicles to service the facility efficiently without entering pedestrian areas or landscaped parts of the site. The route between the refuse store and collection point is hard surfaced, step-free and suitable for wheeled containers.

3.105 Responsibility for the ongoing management of waste will rest with Rochdale AFC, including maintaining the refuse enclosure, ensuring appropriate segregation of waste streams, arranging collections and managing specialist clinical waste disposal. The proposed arrangements will ensure that waste generated by the clubhouse is managed in a safe, hygienic and sustainable manner.

Pre-Application Engagement with Rochdale Borough Council

3.106 The proposed development has been informed by an ongoing programme of pre-application engagement with Rochdale Borough Council. Two formal pre-application meetings were held with Officers Anna Hayes and Ryan Killeen on 11 June 2026, and with Officer Ryan Killeen 24 July 2026 respectively, enabling the project team to discuss the emerging proposals with officers and obtain feedback throughout the evolution of the scheme.

3.107 The first pre-application meeting was undertaken to introduce the emerging proposals, present the work completed to date and seek the Council's initial views on the principle of development. In particular, feedback was sought on:

- The appropriate planning use classes associated with the proposed development;
- The acceptability of the proposed development in principle at this location;
- The acceptability of re-provision and enhancement of existing sports facilities;
- The appropriateness of emerging sports mitigation and pitch re-provision strategy; and
- The overall approach to balancing community, recreational and sporting objectives.

Pre-App 1 Feedback

3.108 Officers acknowledged the potential benefits of the proposals, particularly in relation to the enhancement of sports provision, increased opportunities for year-round use, improvements to drainage infrastructure and the continued delivery of community facilities. Officers advised, however, that the planning application would need to be supported by a robust evidence base and a clear design rationale.

3.109 Key issues identified included the need to better demonstrate the existing role and value of the site, the extent of the proposed changes, and the manner in which any potential impacts would be outweighed by the wider public, recreational and sporting benefits arising from the development.

3.110 Officers were broadly supportive of the principle of the proposals, subject to the submission of sufficient supporting evidence. It was noted that, given the site's designation as open space and recreational land, the application would need to carefully address the ecological, visual and recreational qualities of the existing site alongside the benefits that would be delivered by the proposed development.

3.111 The following matters, were highlighted for further consideration:

Planning Matters
• Presentation of the development as a hybrid proposal principally comprising Use Class F2 and Use Class E(d) uses; • Clearly defining the existing role of the site, its future function and how community access and recreational opportunities would be maintained or enhanced; • Demonstrating the need for the proposed facilities, including consideration of the loss and reprovision of cricket facilities and local demand; • Confirming the extent of community access to pitches and associated facilities; and • Addressing the site's greenspace corridor designation.
Design Matters
• The demolition and replacement of the existing pavilion was not identified as a fundamental concern, although officers noted the 20% increase in building footprint compared to the existing facility; • The acceptability of the proposed buildings would depend on their scale, design quality, visual impact and relationship with one another; • The application should demonstrate a coherent architectural approach across the development despite the involvement of different architecture teams; • Consideration should be given to site legibility, wayfinding, signage and the visitor experience throughout the site; and • The introduction of fencing, artificial pitches and associated infrastructure should be supported by a clear design and landscape strategy demonstrating how openness, permeability and landscape character have been addressed.

Table 3: Pre-Application Engagement Feedback

3.112 The feedback received through the first pre-application process provided a valuable framework for the subsequent evolution of the proposals. The comments informed further design development, technical assessment and the preparation of the planning balance and supporting evidence base submitted with this application.

Pre-App 1 Design Response

3.113 In response to the Council's comments, the design team undertook a comprehensive review of the proposals and prepared a detailed planning and design justification demonstrating the need for the development and the benefits arising from the enhancement of the site's sporting and community facilities.

3.114 In response to the Council's comments, the project team undertook a comprehensive review of the proposals and commissioned a range of technical workstreams to further refine the scheme and strengthen the supporting evidence base.

3.115 In relation to the planning matters raised, the proposals were refined and clearly described as a hybrid Use Class F2/E(d) development, reflecting the sporting, community, recreation and wellbeing functions

proposed. Significant additional work was undertaken by FMG Consulting in support of the Sports Statement to establish sporting need, assess existing provision, consider cricket re-provision, demonstrate future demand and develop appropriate community use and management arrangements. The planning case has also been strengthened through a detailed assessment of the site's Recreational Management Area, Protected Open Land and Greenspace Corridor designations and the extent to which the proposals retain and enhance the recreational function of the Site.

- 3.116 In relation to design matters, the layout was refined to cluster development around the existing access corridor, pavilion area and established activity nodes, thereby limiting the spread of built form across the wider playing fields. The replacement Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub remains closely associated with the existing pavilion location, whilst the Rochdale AFC facility has been carefully positioned within the site's reprofiled landform to reduce its visual prominence. A coordinated architectural and landscape approach was also developed to ensure that the various elements of the scheme would read as a coherent development despite being delivered by separate organisations.
- 3.117 Additional consideration was also given to visitor experience, movement and landscape integration. The proposals were refined to improve legibility, enhance pedestrian and cycle connections, and ensure that fencing, lighting, parking and associated infrastructure formed part of a wider landscape-led design strategy. Further work was undertaken in relation to earthworks, drainage improvements, biodiversity enhancement, landscape bunding and planting to ensure that the openness, permeability and parkland character of Bowlee Community Park were appropriately considered throughout the design process.
- 3.118 Following these revisions, the updated scheme was presented to officers through a second pre-application meeting. The feedback received during this stage informed the final amendments made prior to submission of the planning application.
- 3.119 The second pre-application meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the more detailed aspects of the proposals and to review the progress made in addressing the Council's earlier comments.

Pre-App 2 Feedback

- 3.120 The Council's second response included the following observations and recommendations:
- The overall layout, distribution and quantum of development were considered broadly consistent with officer expectations. Whilst the scheme represented an intensification of activity on the site, officers noted that this would be comparable to other developments located along Heywood Old Road.
 - Further consideration was recommended regarding views into the site from Heywood Old Road and opportunities to mitigate visual impacts where appropriate.
 - Officers encouraged continued refinement of the external materials palette to strengthen the visual relationship between the two principal buildings.
 - The proposed pedestrian and cycle network was positively received, particularly its integration with existing routes through the Community Park. Officers advised that cycle parking should be positioned to ensure good levels of natural surveillance and user safety.

- Officers noted that the removal of trees within parts of the site would create more direct views towards the proposed buildings and parking areas. Additional landscape interventions were therefore recommended to soften the appearance of development and mitigate potential urbanising effects.
- Consideration was requested regarding the impact of external lighting on visual amenity during hours of darkness, whilst ensuring appropriate levels of safety and security were maintained.

3.121 The matters raised during the second pre-application process were carefully considered by the project team and have informed the final iteration of the proposals. The submitted scheme reflects this collaborative process and responds positively to the advice provided by Council officers throughout the pre-application engagement programme.

Design Response to Pre-app 2

3.122 Rochdale Borough Council's second pre-application response confirmed that the overall layout, distribution of development and quantum of development were broadly acceptable in principle. Officers recognised that the proposals represented an intensification of activity at the site but considered this comparable to other recreational and sporting developments along the Heywood Old Road corridor.

3.123 The layout has been refined to respond positively to the landscape character of Bowlee Community Park and the advice received through the pre-application process. Development has been clustered around the existing access corridor and established activity areas, limiting the spread of built form across the wider playing fields and retaining the predominantly open character of the Site.

3.124 Particular consideration has been given to views from Heywood Old Road. The proposals are supported by a comprehensive landscape strategy incorporating new planting, habitat creation and landscape bunding formed from site-derived material generated through reprofiling works. These interventions assist in integrating the development into the wider parkland setting, reducing visual impacts and contributing towards biodiversity net gain.

3.125 The proposed materials palette has continued to evolve through the design process to create a coherent relationship between the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub and the Rochdale AFC facility, whilst allowing each building to respond to its own operational requirements and setting.

3.126 No new vehicular access is proposed. The development continues to utilise the existing point of access from Heywood Old Road, with internal circulation, parking and pedestrian routes arranged around this established arrival point. Existing pedestrian routes and desire lines through Bowlee Community Park have informed the layout and are retained or enhanced where appropriate. Cycle parking has been positioned within active areas of the site benefiting from natural surveillance.

3.127 The proposals include significant reprofiling and drainage improvements to address longstanding constraints affecting the quality and reliability of the existing pitches. These works will deliver enhanced playing surfaces and improved year-round usability, whilst creating opportunities for landscape enhancement and ecological improvements.

3.128 The Rochdale AFC building has been positioned at pitch level, allowing the site's topography and reprofiling

works to reduce its apparent scale when viewed from across the wider Site. Access is provided via ramps and steps from the central arrival area, ensuring the building is integrated with the wider development whilst minimising visual prominence within the parkland setting.

- 3.129 The development also incorporates associated infrastructure including sports lighting, fencing, boundary treatments, spectator facilities and site furniture. The final specification and detailed design of these elements will continue to evolve in response to the operational requirements of the respective operators, whilst ensuring an appropriate response to visual amenity, landscape character, ecology and site management considerations.
- 3.130 Overall, the submitted scheme reflects a positive response to the comments raised during the pre-application process and balances the operational requirements of a modern sports and wellbeing hub with the need to retain the landscape, recreational and visual qualities of Bowlee Community Park.

Public Consultation

- 3.131 A public consultation event was held on Thursday 25th June 2026 at David Lloyd Manchester North, Heywood Old Road, Middleton. The event formed part of the pre-application consultation process and provided an opportunity for local residents, community groups, sports clubs, elected Members and other interested stakeholders to review the emerging proposals, ask questions and provide feedback on the proposed Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub.
- 3.132 The consultation was supported by a targeted public engagement programme. Approximately 500 consultation leaflets were distributed to surrounding residential and commercial properties, details of the proposals were made available online, and local Ward Members and other stakeholders were directly notified of the consultation exercise. The consultation materials set out the proposed development, the rationale for the project and the opportunities for residents and stakeholders to provide feedback.
- 3.133 The consultation event was attended by approximately 19 people, including four elected Members. Recognising that attendance was lower than anticipated, the consultation boards were subsequently displayed at Middleton Arena and an online consultation platform remained available to provide additional opportunities for engagement. Across the consultation period, a total of 492 responses were received through a combination of physical and online feedback channels.
- 3.134 The consultation findings demonstrated a strong level of public interest in the future of the Site and generated a significant volume of feedback regarding both the opportunities and challenges associated with the proposals. Many respondents recognised the need for investment in Bowlee Playing Fields, improvements to the quality and reliability of sports facilities, enhanced opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity, and the wider benefits associated with creating a modern sports and wellbeing hub for Middleton and the wider Borough. Concerns raised through the consultation process primarily related to matters such as open space, ecology, trees, traffic, parking, lighting, community access and the future operation of the facilities.
- 3.135 The consultation process has directly informed the evolution of the proposals and the supporting evidence



base. The feedback received helped shape the design development process, informed the preparation of technical assessments and played an important role in the refinement of the landscape strategy, ecology mitigation, community access arrangements and wider planning submission.

- 3.136 The submitted Statement of Community Involvement concludes that the proposals generated substantial engagement and that the consultation process provided a meaningful opportunity for residents, sports clubs, community organisations, schools and other stakeholders to understand the proposals and influence their development. The consultation exercise therefore represents an important part of the evidence base supporting the application and demonstrates continued engagement throughout the evolution of the project.
- 3.137 Full details of the consultation methodology, engagement activities, consultation responses and resulting amendments to the scheme are provided within the submitted Statement of Community Involvement, prepared by Enabl.



4

Planning Policy Context



4. Planning Policy Context

Relevant Planning Policy

4.1 The relevant parts of the adopted development plan are:

- Places for Everyone (2024);
- Core Strategy (2016); and
- Unitary Development Plan (2006).

4.2 Relevant policies and proposals within these documents which are summarised in the table below:

Policy	Summary
UDP (2006)	
G/D/1: Defined Urban Area	<i>The boundary of the urban area is defined on the proposals map. Outside this area, only development that is compatible with the policies in this chapter will be Acceptable. [...]</i>
D/10: Protected Open Land	<i>Within the areas of Protected Open Land defined on the Proposals Map, development proposals will be permitted that fall within one or more of the following categories:</i> <i>a. development which would be acceptable were it in the Green Belt; or</i> <i>b. [...]</i> <i>c. [...]</i> <i>Where new buildings are permitted, they should be sited to form a group with existing buildings. Where this is not possible, buildings, car parking areas and other new structures, should be sited where they will be well screened and unobtrusive in the landscape. All buildings and extensions should be of a high standard of design, using materials that are compatible with the landscape, and should not detract from the visual amenity and environment of adjacent Green Belt.</i>
G/3: Protection of Existing Recreational Open Space	<i>The development of public or private recreational open space for any other purpose will not be permitted unless one or more of the following exceptions applies:</i> <i>a) The development is for a non commercial community use within a park or other outdoor recreation area, is ancillary to the recreational use of the area, would not lead to a deficiency in recreational open space in relation to present or future needs, and does not harm the recreational, townscape or nature conservation value of the remaining open space;</i> <i>b) Alternative provision is made of at least the equivalent quantity and quality of recreational open space, in a satisfactory location and taking account of local environmental and traffic considerations;</i> <i>c) The development funds improvements to existing outdoor sports facilities within the site or on another site, commensurate with the open space being lost; and</i> <i>d) The development comprises a built recreational facility of greater benefit</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>to the wider community than the open space being lost and does not result in a serious deficiency in open space in the area.</i> <i>Where exceptions are to be made under (b) and (c) above, the Council may impose planning conditions and/or seek planning obligations under S106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the suitable replacement or improvement of open space.</i> <i>With regard to criterion (d), such proposals will only be permitted where no suitable alternative brownfield site exists.</i> <i>School playing fields which are surplus to educational requirements, and privately-owned sports grounds which have deteriorated due to lack of use and maintenance, will continue to be safeguarded from development as they still offer potential to meet current and future recreational needs.</i>
G/8: Greenspace Corridors	G/8 (A) <i>Greenspace Corridors shown on the Proposals Map will be protected. Development and other measures which will enhance their recreational, ecological or landscape and amenity value will be permitted. [...]. Within all parts of Greenspace Corridors, the Council will not permit development proposals which would:</i> <i>a) Lead to an unacceptable narrowing or a division of the corridor into sections, thereby,</i> <i>i. restricting the movement of wildlife along it, or</i> <i>ii. restricting the movement of people along established or proposed recreational routes or rights of way;</i> <i>b) Result in the loss or severance of links between areas of recreational open space;</i> <i>c) Result in the loss of existing valued recreational facilities or prejudice proposed new facilities; or</i> <i>d) Prevent public access into the corridor at strategic locations; or which would result in unacceptable harm to:-</i> <i>e) The better landscape qualities and character of the corridor;</i> <i>f) The amenity value of the corridor where it provides welcome visual relief from urban development, including attractive views in and out of the corridor;</i> <i>g) Features of nature conservation interest, including designated and non designated sites; or</i> <i>h) Viable agricultural operations, including good quality grazing land and allotments.</i> G/8 (B) <i>Any new development permitted within or adjacent to the corridors will be of a design, and use materials appropriate to, the character and setting of the corridor. Boundary treatments and landscaping should help to retain or re-establish a 'countryside' character in the corridors and contribute to nature conservation</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>interest through design and use of appropriate species.</i> G/8 (C) <i>Proposals for open or built recreational facilities should be of a scale and nature appropriate to the location and should not lead to an unacceptable level of recreational activity having regard to visual amenity, nature conservation interests and the need to retain an informal or unspoilt character. Development or activities should not conflict with existing uses or activities (e.g., grazing) and should not create disturbance for local residents.</i> G/8 (D) <i>Development proposals will be permitted that protect and enhance Greenspace Corridors and realise their potential for recreation and nature conservation.</i>
RE/6: Recreational Rights of Way	[...] <i>Where appropriate and practicable, the Council will support schemes which facilitate the greater use of these routes by cyclists, horseriders and those people with impaired mobility. Where opportunities and resources permit, the Council will support and implement enhancement schemes such as waymarking, picnic, interpretation and other facilities along the routes.</i> [...] <i>In the implementation of this proposal, the Council will take account of the conservation of the countryside including the buildings within it, the protection of agricultural interests, areas of nature conservation importance (including designated areas) and the character and purpose of the route where appropriate.</i>
RE/7(k): Recreational Management Areas	<i>The Council will, as resources and opportunities permit, develop the recreational potential of the areas shown on the Proposals Map and listed below, through effective management:</i> [...] <i>k) Bowlee Community Park and environs</i> <i>Within these areas, the Council will promote outdoor recreational uses including both specialist sports and active outdoor pursuits and passive recreation (e.g., nature appreciation and related educational pursuits) that are consistent with the conservation and enhancement of the local landscape and ecology. Such uses should not be detrimental to the amenity or character of the area or lead to conflict with other recreational or land management interests. Management measures will include the provision of visitor facilities such as footpaths, nature trails, car parks, picnic areas, visitor interpretation points, play areas, events areas etc. (as appropriate to the area) and management services. Existing land uses and resources will be safeguarded and access to areas sensitive to visitor usage restricted.</i> <i>New built development will not generally be permitted unless it is in connection</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>with an existing building or use, or is ancillary to an outdoor use, and is of an appropriate scale, design and layout.</i> <i>The types of recreational activities, visitor facilities, landscaping works and management regimes will have regard to the particular character and potential of the area, local needs and opinions and the effect on surrounding uses.</i>
A/24: Strategic Highway Network	<i>The Strategic Highway Network, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be maintained, improved, signed and managed to accommodate main flows of general traffic within and through the Borough, other than motorway traffic. Physical traffic management measures will continue to be introduced where it is evident that general traffic is using less suitable roads to the detriment of road safety and amenity. Pedestrian, cyclist and bus access requirements will be met where required.</i> <i>[...]</i>
EM/7: Development and Flood Risk	<i>Development will not be permitted in areas identified as flood plains, or other areas where development could contribute to increased flood risk, unless an appropriate flood risk assessment has been carried out and all of the following criteria are met:</i> <i>a) It will not increase the risk of flooding within the flood plain or in adjoining areas by reducing flood storage capacity, increasing flows within a flood plain or through the additional discharge of surface water;</i> <i>b) It will not itself be at risk from flooding;</i> <i>c) Appropriate sustainable drainage systems are used;</i> <i>d) Adequate access adjacent to the water course for maintenance is provided;</i> <i>e) Existing or proposed flood defences are protected;</i> <i>f) It would not result in extensive culverting; and</i> <i>g) Flood defence works required as a consequence of development are provided at the developer's expense.</i>
EM/8: Protection of Surface and Ground Water	<i>Development likely to pose an unacceptable risk to surface water and ground water quality, or to water supply will not be permitted.</i> <i>Development proposals will be expected to:</i> <i>a) Make satisfactory arrangements for the disposal of sewage, trade effluent or contaminated surface water;</i> <i>b) Avoid exacerbating existing problems such as premature or increased frequency of discharges through storm sewer overflows due to inadequate infrastructure or lack of capacity;</i> <i>c) Ensure adequate safeguards against the pollution of surface or ground water through the spillage or leakage of stored oils/chemicals or other potentially polluting substances; and</i> <i>d) Ensure that there will be no detrimental effect upon the availability of water resources to existing users and the environment</i>
Core Strategy (2016)	
SD1: Delivering Sustainable Development	<i>When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work pro-</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>actively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.</i> <i>Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.</i> <i>Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:</i> • <i>Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or</i> • <i>Specific policies in the National Planning Policy Framework indicate that development should be restricted.</i>
SP3/M: The Strategy for Middleton	<i>The priorities for Middleton are to:</i> [...] <i>Improve open space and access to the countryside (SO3,SO4,SO5) by</i> • <i>Improving the quality and function of open space across the town (Policies P1, G6);</i> • <i>Protecting and enhancing key landscapes and countryside around Middleton [...] and</i> <i>Improving links between the urban area and the countryside (Policies G6, T2).</i>
E5: Encouraging the Visitor Economy	[...] In promoting the above opportunities we will support: [...] d. Outdoor sport and water based recreation facilities appropriate to the location.
C6: Improving Health and Well Being	<i>We will improve people's health and well being and reduce health inequalities by:</i> • <i>Creating an economic, physical and social environment which promotes and supports healthy lifestyles</i> • [...] <i>We will achieve this through:</i> [...] <i>e. Ensuring good provision of education, community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities in town centres, local centres and areas of greatest health deprivation (Policies C7,C8);</i> <i>f. Seeking high quality design of buildings, streets and spaces to create neighbourhoods that are safe to use, easy to move through, adaptable and sustainable (Policy P3);</i> <i>g. Managing and mitigating the effects of climate change by tackling greenhouse emissions, reducing risks of flooding, promoting tree planting and seeking to avoid adverse microclimates (Policies G1,G6,G7,G8);</i> <i>h. Maintaining and enhancing the borough's biodiversity, natural environment, open spaces and outdoor sport and recreational areas to create a coherent</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>network of green infrastructure that can help promote better health (Policies C8,G6,G7 & G8);</i> <i>i. Identifying and implementing measures to reduce traffic movements and congestion to reduce air and noise pollution (Policy T1);</i> <i>j. Encouraging development that promotes active living by making places more accessible by walking, cycling and public transport (Policy T2);</i> <i>[...]</i>
C8: Improving Community, Sport, Leisure and Cultural Facilities	<i>We will support and promote the provision of better community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities and will follow the sequential approach set out below, provided they are of a type and scale appropriate to the size of the settlement, are accessible and support our objectives. We will:</i> <i>[...]</i> <i>b. Require facilities serving other towns to be located in or adjacent to town centres or local centres or highly accessible locations;</i> <i>c. Require facilities intended to serve the everyday needs of a community or neighbourhood to be in or adjacent to key local centres;</i> <i>[...]</i> <i>e. Support proposals for facilities outside centres provided they are highly accessible by a choice of transport, particularly sustainable modes of transport, and do not harm the character or amenity of the area, and:</i> <i>i. it is for an outdoor sports pitch to meet the needs of the community and the borough as a whole (Policy G6); or</i> <i>ii. it is a community building or cultural venue based on specific local connections or demand; or</i> <i>iii. it is a sports facility which supports a business use, is appropriate in an employment area, or supports an outdoor sports facility, education or related community/visitor facility; or</i> <i>iv. [...]</i> <i>v. to allow for outdoor sports pitches to meet the needs of the community and the borough as a whole (Policy G6).</i> <i>[...]</i> <i>g. Identify sites for new or extended facilities, or protect existing facilities from development for other uses, through the Allocations DPD; and</i> <i>[...]</i>
P3: Improving Design of New Development	<i>We will require all new developments, including associated landscaping, regardless of location in the borough, to adhere to high standards of design. The following design principles should be adhered to wherever relevant:</i> <i>• Enhance the borough's identity and sense of place, by respecting context where it is positive and having regard to the scale, density, massing, height, layout, landscape, materials and access of surrounding buildings and areas in general;</i> <i>• Ensure that buildings contribute positively to the townscape, and are well proportioned;</i> <i>• Incorporating design measures that design out crime and ensure</i>

Policy	Summary
	<i>developments and spaces are safe to use and access (including lighting as appropriate);</i> • <i>Provide an appropriate mix of uses and consider the needs of all sections of society;</i> • <i>Ensure a development is easy to move through and get around, especially for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, disabled people and emergency service vehicles;</i> • <i>Provide a hierarchy of routes, streets and spaces, relating positively to visual connections between the development and its surroundings;</i> • <i>Ensure that the intended functions of buildings and spaces are easily understood, and their entrances appropriately located and visible;</i> • <i>Minimise impact upon the environment, and help adapt to the impacts of climate change, including by re-using existing buildings and materials (maximising the benefits of existing embodied energy) and utilising sustainable drainage (Policies G1 and G2);</i> • <i>Design buildings and spaces so that quality and appearance can be maintained over time; and</i> • <i>Reduce the monotony and visual impact of car parking areas by using substantial and well integrated landscaping.</i> <i>All developments should have regard to the principles outlined in the following documents (or equivalent documents which replace them), which set out in detail the Council's design expectations for new development:</i> • <i>Urban Design Guides SPDs, September 2007</i> ◦ <i>Urban Design Guide SPD, September 2007;</i> ◦ <i>Residential Design Guide SPD, September 2007;</i> ◦ <i>Public Realm Design Guide SPD, September 2007;</i> • <i>[...]</i> <i>Design and access statements and design briefs must include demonstration of how these design principles have been taken into account in the design of development proposals.</i>
G5: Managing Protected Open Land	1. Protecting open land outside the urban area and not in the green belt. <i>We will continue to protect from development open land outside the urban area and not in the green belt in the following broad areas:</i> • <i>Land west and south of Middleton;</i> <i>[...]</i> 2. Development in Protected Open Land <i>a. Development on open land outside the urban area and not in the green belt will be resisted unless: it is limited development that would be acceptable were it in the green belt; or</i> <i>b. it is small scale development which is consistent with other detailed policies and site allocations in the Local Development Plan; or</i> <i>c. [...]</i>
G6: Enhancing	[...]

Policy	Summary
Green Infrastructure	<i>We will expect development proposals and other proposals affecting green infrastructure to:</i> <i>a. be consistent with the above focus for green infrastructure and the wider than local value that green infrastructure can have;</i> <i>b. have regard to local landscape character and contribute to its conservation or enhancement;</i> <i>c. avoid the loss of existing urban greenspace or features e.g. trees unless suitable alternative provision is made, it has limited value, and its development or change of use will help to meet other sustainability or local regeneration objectives;</i> <i>d. [...]</i> <i>e. take opportunities to improve access to, and the provision of, natural greenspace in accordance with local strategies and standards</i> <i>f. take opportunities to secure innovative solutions to the design of urban open space to widen its potential functions e.g. flood risk management, promoting urban wildlife or climate change adaptation;</i> <i>g. not sever, or impede the key functions of designated greenspace corridors or river valleys, or detract from their natural, visual or recreational quality, but enhance their value and accessibility;</i> <i>h. protect ancient woodlands and hedgerows, support new woodland and tree planting in new developments, and replace removed trees from a site at a ratio of 2:1; and</i> <i>i. [...]</i>
G7: Increasing The Value of Biodiversity and Geodiversity	<i>[...]</i> <i>We will expect development proposals and improvements to:</i> <i>a. Protect and include existing biodiversity (including established biodiversity interest on brownfield land) within new developments, public realm and open spaces and meet the requirements of the Biodiversity and Development SPD, Greater Manchester and Local Biodiversity Action Plans;</i> <i>b. Protect and enhance existing features such as peatland, ponds, wetlands, reservoirs, mill lodges, trees, hedges, wooded areas, meadows, flora and fauna;</i> <i>c. Take opportunities to promote biodiversity and create new habitats through new development using landscaping and building and construction features wherever possible (e.g. ponds, species of vegetation, green roofs and walls, bat boxes, roof space, appropriate nest boxes and landscaping);</i> <i>d. Enhance strategic wildlife corridors and the most natural areas and ensure that habitats and corridors are not fragmented by development;</i> <i>e. Improve access where appropriate to new or existing biodiversity interest for public enjoyment; and</i> <i>f. [...]</i>

Policy	Summary
G8: Managing water resources and flood risk	We will ensure that new development (including flood risk mitigation measures) does not lead to any form of increased flooding locally or further downstream, does not impede natural water and flood risk management, is not detrimental to existing or potential flood storage areas, contributes where possible to alleviating existing flood risk, is itself well protected from flood risk and ensures prudent use of water resources. We will require: a. Compliance with a 'sequential' approach to new development and flood risk, directing development away from areas of high risk, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework; b. Full regard to and compliance with the advice of the Environment Agency (or equivalent agency) and the objectives and priorities for flood risk management set out in the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, including any mitigation measures recommended for particular sites; c. Full regard to the published evidence of local flood risk and its significance as included in Strategic Flood Risk Assessments, Surface Water Management Plans and other recognised sources of flood risk data and the production of additional Flood Risk Assessments (FRAs) as appropriate; d. Incorporation of appropriate measures for the management of surface and flood water, including flood storage areas, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and the protection of 'overland flow paths'; [...]
G9: Reducing the impact of pollution, contamination and land instability	We will reduce all forms of pollution, contamination and land instability in the borough, by: [...] b. Requiring that development does not have impacts that lead to an unacceptable increase in air, water, noise, light or other pollution; [...]
T2: Improving Accessibility	We will improve accessibility by locating development where good access to public transport is available or can be provided, backed by measures to reduce the need for travel and effective provision for cyclists, pedestrians and people with impaired mobility. Development will be appropriately located to minimise the need to travel by car and the number and length of car trips made to access local amenities. Transport improvements will focus access to priority regeneration areas, e.g. town centres, housing regeneration areas and economic growth corridors. We will do this by: a. Requiring development and infrastructure proposals to satisfy the Council's accessibility hierarchy. This requires transport user needs to be considered and addressed in the following priority order: i. People with impaired mobility and pedestrians; ii. Cyclists; iii. Public transport (Bus, Heavy and Light Rail) and "clean fuelled" vehicles; iv. Taxi, private hire vehicles; v. Powered two wheeled vehicles; vi. Commercial traffic for local access;

Policy	Summary
	vii. Shopping, visitors / tourist and off peak traffic; and viii. Long stay and peak time commuter traffic. [...] d. We will require a Transport Statement for smaller developments that exceed the guidance on Transport Assessment thresholds [...] [...] f. We will require developments to provide parking in compliance with the Council's Car Parking Standards (see Appendix 5) [...]
DM1: General Development Requirements	All development proposals, including changes of use of land and buildings, extensions and alterations, will be expected to demonstrate that they: a. Are of high quality design and take the opportunity to enhance the quality of the area; b. Are compatible with surrounding land uses, both in terms of its impact upon those uses and the impact of the surrounding land uses upon the amenities of future residents / users; c. Do not adversely affect the amenity of residents or users through visual intrusion, overbearing impact, overshadowing or loss of privacy; d. Mitigate against any impacts due to noise, air, dust, light and odour pollution, traffic generation or inadequate access, where such mitigation is identified as being necessary; e. Provide satisfactory vehicular access with adequate parking, manoeuvring, and servicing arrangements taking into account of the proposed use and location; f. Do not have an adverse impact on health, through its impact or the effect of existing problems e.g. land contamination, or poor air quality; g. Provide, or demonstrate the availability of, the service and community infrastructure necessary to meet local needs e.g. local shops, community, leisure and sport facilities and provision of open space; h. Minimise opportunities for crime against people or property; [...] m. Do not lead to impacts detrimental to the conservation interests of European Protected Sites.
Places for Everyone (2024)	
JP-Strat6: Northern Areas	A significant increase in the competitiveness of the northern areas will be sought. [...]
JP-Strat13: Strategic Green Infrastructure	The following strategic green infrastructure assets will be protected and enhanced as key features: [...] 4. Trees and woodland (see Policy JP-G7 'Trees and Woodland'). The protection and enhancement of these key strategic green infrastructure assets is complemented by a suite of policies to protect and enhance our network of green infrastructure, including protecting and enhancing sites of ecological value. This will enable our residents to access and maximise the benefits of green infrastructure on their health and wellbeing.
JP-S1: Sustainable Development	To help tackle climate change, development should aim to maximise its economic, social and environmental benefits simultaneously, minimise its adverse impacts,

Policy	Summary
	utilise sustainable construction techniques and actively seek opportunities to secure net gains across each of the different objectives. [...]
JP-S2: Carbon and Energy	The aim of delivering a carbon neutral Greater Manchester no later than 2038, with a dramatic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, will be supported through a range of measures including: [...] 5. An expectation that new development will, unless it can be demonstrated that it is not practicable or financially viable; a. Be net zero carbon which applies: • from adoption– to regulated operational carbon emissions; • from 2028 - to all emissions 'in construction'. From 2025 development should also calculate and minimise carbon emissions from unregulated emissions alongside regulated emissions. [...] b. Incorporate adequate electric vehicle charging points, in line with Part S of the Building Regulations, unless superseded by relevant Local Plan policies, to future proof for the likely long-term demand, taking account of the potential maximum energy demand for the site [...] e. For non-residential developments, achieve at least BREEAM excellent standard (or equivalent) for the 'Ene 01 – reduction of energy use and carbon emissions' category rising to 'BREEAM outstanding' equivalent for ENE 01 from 2028.
JP-S4: Flood Risk and the Water Environment	An integrated catchment-based approach will be taken to protect the quantity and quality of water bodies with reference to the North West River Basin Management Plan and managing flood risk, by: [...] 3. Locating and designing development so as to minimise the impacts of current and future flood risk, including retrofitting or relocating existing developments, infrastructure and places to increase resilience to flooding; 4. Expecting developments to manage surface water run-off through sustainable drainage systems and as close to source as possible. Development should achieve greenfield run-off rates unless it is demonstrated to be impracticable. District local plans should consider setting more detailed surface water drainage policies to reflect local circumstances, including alternative surface water discharge rates, such as in areas with critical drainage issues; 5. Ensuring that sustainable drainage systems: i. Are designed to provide multifunctional benefits wherever possible, including for water quality, nature conservation and recreation; ii. Avoid adverse impacts on water quality and any possibility of discharging hazardous substances to ground; iii. Are delivered in a holistic and integrated manner, including on larger sites split into different phases; and iv. Are managed and maintained appropriately to ensure their proper functioning over the lifetime of the development.

Policy	Summary
	[...]
JP-S5: Clean Air	A comprehensive range of measures will be taken to support improvements in air quality, [...] including: 1. Locating and designing development, and focusing transport investment, so as to reduce reliance on forms of transport that generate air pollution; [...] 10. Promoting actions that help remove pollutants from the air, such as enhancing the green infrastructure network and using innovative building materials that capture air pollutants; and 11. Development should be located in areas that maximise the use of sustainable travel modes and be designed to minimise exposure to high levels of air pollution, particularly for vulnerable users.
JP-G1: Landscape Character	Development within a Landscape Character Type, as shown on Figure 8.1, should reflect and respond to the special qualities and sensitivities of the key landscape characteristics of its location, including having regard to: • Topography, geology and drainage; • Land use and field patterns; • Semi-natural habitats and woodland cover; • Archaeology and cultural heritage; • Settlement, road pattern and rights of way; and • Views and perceptual qualities. The interface of new development with the surrounding countryside/landscape is of particular importance. These transitional areas require well-considered and sensitive treatment. In particular, opportunities to improve the intactness and condition of the landscape should be taken, especially in conjunction with seeking a net enhancement of biodiversity/geodiversity resources under Policy JP-G8 'A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity'. In implementing this strategic policy, regard will be had to the Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment (GMLCSA), in particular its guidance on future development and landscape management/ enhancement within areas covered by each landscape character type.
JP-G2: Green Infrastructure Network	A strategic approach will be taken to the protection, management and enhancement of our Green Infrastructure in order to protect and enhance the ecosystem services which the Green Infrastructure Network provides, including flood management, climate change mitigation and adaptation. [...] Development within and around the Green Infrastructure Network should be consistent with delivering major green infrastructure improvements within them and should contribute to improvements. [...]
JP-G6: Urban Green Space	To ensure there is an appropriate scale, type, quality and distribution of accessible urban green space that can support a high quality of life and other important green infrastructure functions: • existing urban green space will be protected and enhanced in balance with

Policy	Summary
	<i>other considerations; and</i> • [...] <i></i> <i>Development should be designed to support the positive use of nearby green spaces, such as by offering a high-quality setting, providing natural surveillance, and facilitating easy access by walking and cycling.</i>
JP-G7: Trees and Woodland	<i>We will work to deliver the aims and objectives of the Greater Manchester Tree and Woodland Strategy, aiming to significantly increase tree cover, protect and enhance woodland, and connect people to the trees and woodland around them.</i> [...] <i>12. Where development would result in the loss of existing trees, requiring replacement on the basis of two new trees for each tree lost, or other measures that would also result in a net enhancement in the character and quality of the treescape and biodiversity value in the local area, with a preference for on-site provision; and</i> <i>13. Protecting trees and woodland during the construction phase of development.</i>
JP-G8: A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity	<i>Through local planning and associated activities a net enhancement of biodiversity resources will be sought, including, where relevant, by:</i> [...] <i>2. Improving connections between habitats, to protect and enhance the provision of corridors, ecological networks (including Nature Recovery Networks) and steppingstones that enable the movement of species, especially as the climate changes;</i> <i>3. Enhancing the management of existing habitats, including through habitat restoration, avoiding habitat fragmentation and combating invasive species; [...]</i> <i>Development will be expected to:</i> <i>Follow the mitigation hierarchy of:</i> <i>Avoiding significant harm to biodiversity, particularly where it is irreplaceable, through consideration of alternative sites with less harmful impacts, then</i> <i>Adequately mitigating any harm to biodiversity, then</i> <i>Adequately compensating for any remaining harm to biodiversity</i> <i>Avoid fragmenting or severing connectivity between habitats;</i> <i>Achieve a measurable net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%</i> <i>Make appropriate provision for long-term management of habitats and geological features connected to the development;</i> <i>[...]</i> <i>Development proposals should be informed by the findings and recommendations of the appropriate biodiversity/ecological assessment(s) in the PfE evidence base and/or any updated or appropriate biodiversity/ecological assessments submitted as part of the planning application process.</i>
JP-P1: Sustainable Places	<i>We aim to become one of the most liveable city regions in the world, consisting of a series of beautiful, healthy and varied places, each having the following key attributes that all development, wherever appropriate, should be consistent with:</i>



Policy	Summary
	<i>1. Distinctive, with a clear identity that:</i> <i>A. Conserves and enhances the natural environment, landscape features, historic environment and local history and culture;</i> <i>B. Enables a clear understanding of how the place has developed; and</i> <i>C. Respects and acknowledges the character and identity of the locality in terms of design, siting, size, scale and materials used</i> <i>2. Visually stimulating, creating interesting and imaginative environments which raise the human spirit through the use of green space, public art and quality design</i> <i>3. Socially inclusive:</i> <i>A. Responding to the needs of all parts of society;</i> <i>B. Enabling everyone to participate equally and independently;</i> <i>C. Providing opportunities for social contact and support; and</i> <i>D. Promoting a sense of community</i> <i>4. Resilient, capable of dealing with major environmental events</i> <i>5. Adaptable, able to respond easily to varied and changing needs and technologies</i> <i>6. Durable, being built to last and using robust materials that reflect local character, weather well and are easily maintained</i> <i>7. Resource-efficient with:</i> <i>A. A low carbon footprint;</i> <i>B. Efficient use of land;</i> <i>C. Minimised use of new materials;</i> <i>D. High levels of recycling</i> <i>8. Safe, including by designing out crime and terrorism, reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour and by ensuring that developments make appropriate provision for response and evacuation in the case of an emergency or disaster.</i> <i>9. Supported by critical infrastructure, such as energy, water and drainage and green spaces</i> <i>10. Functional and convenient, enabling people and uses to act efficiently with minimal effort, and responding to needs relating to servicing, recycling facilities, refuse collection and storage</i> <i>11. Incorporating inclusive design within all spaces with support for tackling inequality and poverty to form part of creating sustainable places</i> <i>12. Legible, being easy to understand and navigate, with the protection and</i>

Policy	Summary
	enhancement of key views and new development well-integrated into the place 13. Easy to move around for those of all mobility levels, particularly by walking and cycling, with enjoyable routes free from obstacles and disorienting stimuli, and with places to rest 14. Well-connected to other places, particularly by public transport and digital infrastructure enabling everyone to take advantage of the employment, cultural and leisure opportunities across Greater Manchester and beyond 15. Comfortable and inviting, with indoor and outdoor environments: A. Offering a high level of amenity that minimises exposure to pollution; and B. Addressing microclimate issues such as sunlight, indoor air quality, overheating, shade, wind and shelter 16. Incorporating high quality and well managed green infrastructure and quality public realm, with: A. Opportunities for recreation and outdoor play for children, and interaction between the generations; B. Public and private spaces clearly distinguished; C. Development clearly defining, and promoting activity within, public spaces; D. High quality landscaping with schemes 17. Well-served by local shops, services and amenities, including education and health facilities
JP-P3: Cultural Facilities	We will proactively develop and support cultural businesses and attractions in our cities and towns through a range of measures, where appropriate, including: 1. Protecting existing heritage, cultural and community venues, facilities and uses; 2. Supporting the development of new cultural venues in town centres and places with good public transport connectivity; 3. Promoting new, or enhancing existing, locally-distinct clusters of cultural facilities, especially where they can provide an anchor for local regeneration and town centre renewal; [...]
JP-P6: Health	To help tackle health inequality new development will be required, as far as practicable, to: A. Maximise its positive contribution to health and wellbeing, whilst avoiding any potential negative impacts of new development; B. Support healthy lifestyles, including through the use of active design principles making physical activity an easy, practical and attractive choice [...]
JP-P7: Sport and Recreation	A network of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities will be protected and enhanced, supporting greater levels of activity for all ages, including by: 1. Creating a public realm that provides frequent opportunities for play and that all ages can enjoy together; [...]

Policy	Summary
	4. <i>Locating and designing recreation facilities in relation to housing so as to ensure that they are accessible but also minimise the potential for complaints due to disturbance to residential amenity from recreational activity;</i> 5. <i>Protecting and enhancing the public rights of way network, including to:</i> <i>Provide safe and attractive routes to sports and recreation facilities;</i> <i>Improve access to, and connections between different parts of, the green infrastructure network across Greater Manchester and beyond;</i> <i>Expand the network of strategic recreation routes offering longer distance opportunities for walking, cycling and horse-riding;</i> <i>Provide everyday options for green travel;</i> [...] 7. <i>Enabling the continued development of major sports facilities and events, which can further enhance Greater Manchester's international sporting reputation.</i>
JP-C1: An Integrated Network	<i>In order to help deliver an accessible, low carbon Greater Manchester with worldclass connectivity, we will support a range of measures, including:</i> <i>Delivering a pattern of development that minimises both the need to travel and the distance travelled by unsustainable modes to jobs, housing and other key services, including healthcare, education, retail, recreation and leisure facilities, green space and green infrastructure;</i> [...]
JP-C6: Walking and Cycling	<i>In order to help deliver a higher proportion of journeys made by walking and cycling, we will support a range of measures, including:</i> <i>Creating safe, attractive and integrated walking and cycling infrastructure, connecting every neighbourhood and community with reference to national and locally adopted design guidance;</i> <i>Ensuring routes are direct, easily navigable and integrated with the street and public transport network;</i> [...] 6. <i>Utilising and enhancing green infrastructure, including canals, parks and recreation grounds, to create opportunities for walking and cycling;</i>
JP-C8: Transport Requirements of New Development	<i>We will require new development to be located and designed to enable and encourage walking, cycling and public transport use, to reduce the negative effects of car dependency, and help deliver high quality, attractive, liveable and sustainable environments.</i> <i>We will do this by:</i> Connectivity and Permeability <i>Prioritising safe and convenient access to the site and buildings for all users in accordance with the user hierarchy in Policy JP-C1 'An Integrated Network', including:</i> <i>Prioritising new and enhanced walking, cycling and public transport</i>

Policy	Summary
	routes and stops, through and around the site. These routes should: – be direct, safe and convenient; – connect to nearby facilities, employment areas, public transport stops; and – improve the coverage, quality and integration of the wider walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport provision • Ensuring that the layout, design and landscaping of development prioritises the provision of safe, secure and attractive access to local services and facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and people with a disability; and • Ensuring that new development is connected visually and physically; within the site and to the surrounding built environment; 2. Ensure appropriate connectivity to the existing highway network. Design 3. Reducing the need to travel by ensuring that community facilities, services and amenities are provided within the site or within walking distance of new development; [...] Parking Infrastructure 7. Making adequate car parking provision, including for disabled drivers and passengers; 8. Ensuring that car parking provision is well integrated and unobtrusive, so it supports the street scene; and where appropriate parking provision is flexible and can be adapted over time to reflect demand; 9. Incorporating enough secure and covered cycle parking to meet long-term demand from occupiers and visitors in a convenient location that helps to maximise its use [...] Construction Management 15. Ensuring Construction Management Plans are produced for developments, where appropriate, to mitigate construction logistics and environmental impacts including air quality and noise on the surrounding area and encourage sustainable deliveries. Transport Assessments 16. Planning applications will be accompanied by a Transport Assessment / Transport Statement and Travel Plan where appropriate, in order to assess impacts and determine the most appropriate mitigation on the SRN and

Policy	Summary
	<i>local transport network. Where a Transport Assessment is required, this should start with a vision of what the development/allocation is seeking to achieve and then test a set of scenarios to determine the optimum design and transport infrastructure to realise this vision. Consultation should be undertaken, at pre-application stage, with the relevant local highway authorities to agree which committed developments / allocations and which potential transport interventions should be considered, with reference to Appendix D, as appropriate</i> [...]

Table 4: Relevant Planning Policies

Emerging Rochdale Local Plan

- 4.3 Alongside the adopted development plan, regard has also been had to the emerging Rochdale Local Plan. Whilst the Local Plan has not yet been adopted and therefore does not form part of the statutory development plan, it has progressed through Regulation 18 consultation and can be afforded weight in accordance with paragraph 49 of the NPPF.
- 4.4 The emerging Local Plan introduces a more integrated approach to health, wellbeing, green infrastructure, open spaces and recreation facilities than the existing UDP framework. A number of emerging policies are relevant to the proposed development, including:
- SO5 (A Place for People);
 - PE2 (Achieving a Healthy Place);
 - PE3 (Health and Wellbeing);
 - PE6 (Delivering Services and Facilities in the Community);
 - PE7 (Providing Social Value Across the Borough); and
 - PE10 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities).
- 4.5 Collectively, these policies seek to support healthy communities, increased participation in physical activity, improved access to community facilities, enhancement of sport and recreation infrastructure, and the protection and improvement of multifunctional open spaces and green infrastructure. The proposed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub aligns strongly with these objectives through the enhancement of an established sporting destination, provision of new community and wellbeing facilities, investment in sporting infrastructure, biodiversity enhancements and improved opportunities for participation in sport, recreation and physical activity.
- 4.6 Importantly, emerging Policy PE10 places emphasis on the quality, accessibility, functionality and community value of open space and recreation assets, rather than solely their physical extent. This approach is particularly relevant to the proposed development, which retains the Site in sporting, recreational and community use whilst significantly enhancing its capacity, quality and long-term value to the Borough.

Supplementary Planning Documents



Biodiversity and Development SPD (2008)

- 4.7 Provides guidance on integrating biodiversity considerations into the planning and development process, ensuring that development protects, enhances and, where possible, creates habitats for wildlife.
- 4.8 Development should avoid harm to ecological assets and seek opportunities to deliver biodiversity enhancements through habitat retention, creation, landscaping and ecological management. For the proposed playing field improvements, ecological value should be safeguarded and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement incorporated where appropriate.

Climate Change Adaption SPD (2012)

- 4.9 Promotes development that is resilient to the impacts of climate change, including increased rainfall, higher temperatures and extreme weather events. The SPD provides guidance on measures such as sustainable drainage, green infrastructure and water management.
- 4.10 Development should incorporate measures that improve environmental resilience and manage climate-related risks. The proposed works support these objectives by maintaining and enhancing outdoor recreational infrastructure while considering drainage, landscaping and long-term environmental sustainability.

Design and Planning Process - A Guide to Good Practice (2012)

- 4.11 Sets out a structured design and planning process aimed at achieving high-quality development, emphasising site analysis, stakeholder engagement, design evolution and the preparation of robust supporting information.
- 4.12 Development proposals should demonstrate a clear understanding of site context and show how the design responds to local opportunities and constraints. The proposed improvements represent a considered enhancement of an established recreational facility, informed by the characteristics and function of the site.

Urban Design Guide (2007)

- 4.13 Establishes urban design principles to secure high-quality, attractive and functional places, with a focus on local character, accessibility, connectivity, safety and landscape quality.
- 4.14 Development should contribute positively to its surroundings and create well-designed, accessible and sustainable environments. The proposed playing field improvements will maintain and enhance the quality, usability and appearance of an important recreational asset within the local area.



5

Development Plan Compliance

5. Development Plan Compliance

- 5.1 The proposed development compliance against the development plan in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning Act 2004 is set out within this section.
- 5.2 The proposed development comprises the comprehensive redevelopment and enhancement of the existing sporting and recreational facilities at Bowlee to create the Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. The proposals seek to deliver new and enhanced football and cricket provision, modern community sports facilities, health and wellbeing infrastructure, Rochdale AFC training and community facilities, together with associated landscaping, access, drainage and supporting infrastructure.
- 5.3 The Site currently functions as an established sports and community destination, accommodating football pitches, cricket provision, a community pavilion, children's play facilities and associated recreational infrastructure. The proposals build upon this existing role by investing in enhanced sporting provision, replacing ageing facilities and creating a coordinated sports and wellbeing hub capable of supporting a broader range of sporting, recreation, health and community activities.
- 5.4 As set out within the submitted Sports Statement, the proposed development seeks to respond to identified deficiencies in existing provision, including poor drainage, variable pitch quality, limited supporting infrastructure and demand for additional year-round football capacity. The development therefore seeks to improve the quality, capacity, accessibility and resilience of sporting provision whilst retaining the Site's primary function as a destination for sport, recreation and community activity.
- 5.5 The proposals have been developed jointly by Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC and reflect a shared ambition to create a strategically important Football and Community Wellbeing Hub serving Middleton and the wider Rochdale Borough. The scheme brings together community sport, grassroots football, health and wellbeing facilities, community programmes and Rochdale AFC operations within a coordinated masterplan designed to maximise participation opportunities and secure long-term investment in the Site.

Principle of Development and Appropriate Use in this Location

- 5.6 The proposed development comprises the enhancement and expansion of an established sporting and recreational destination through the provision of improved football and cricket facilities, community sports accommodation, health and wellbeing facilities and associated supporting infrastructure. The proposals do not introduce a new or unrelated use onto the Site. Rather, they build upon and strengthen the existing sporting, recreational and community function of Bowlee Community Park, securing its long-term future as a strategic sporting and community asset serving Middleton and the wider Rochdale Borough.
- 5.7 The proposed development is considered to be a hybrid Use Class F2/E(d) development. This reflects the integrated nature of the proposals, which combine outdoor sport and recreation, community facilities, indoor sport, health and wellbeing uses, and ancillary accommodation required to support those activities. These

uses are entirely consistent with the existing role of Bowlee as a sporting and community destination and reinforce the conclusion that the development represents the enhancement of an established recreational facility rather than the introduction of an incompatible or unrelated use.

- 5.8 The principle of the proposed use is strongly supported by the adopted Core Strategy. Policy C8 (Improving Community, Sport and Leisure Facilities) supports the provision and enhancement of community, sport and leisure facilities, including outdoor sports pitches and associated facilities, whilst Policy C6 (Improving Health and Wellbeing) seeks to promote healthier lifestyles through access to recreation, sport, leisure and community facilities. The proposed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub responds directly to these objectives through the enhancement of existing sporting provision, improved community facilities and expanded opportunities for participation in sport, recreation, physical activity and wellbeing programmes.
- 5.9 The proposals are also consistent with the adopted Places for Everyone Plan. Policy JP-P7 (Sport and Recreation Facilities) seeks to protect, maintain and enhance a network of accessible sport and recreation facilities and supports investment which increases participation and improves opportunities for physical activity. The proposed development directly responds to these objectives through the enhancement of an established sporting destination and the provision of improved sporting, recreational and wellbeing facilities.
- 5.10 The spatial designations applying to the Site further support the principle of the proposed use in this location. UDP Policy RE/7(k) identifies Bowlee Community Park as a Recreational Management Area where outdoor recreation, specialist sports facilities, visitor facilities and associated development are actively encouraged. The policy specifically recognises that built development may be appropriate where it is connected to an existing recreational use, ancillary to outdoor recreation and of an appropriate scale and design. The proposed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub aligns directly with these objectives and represents the type of recreational and sporting investment envisaged by the designation.
- 5.11 The Site is also designated as Protected Open Land under UDP Policy D/10. Importantly, Policy D/10 permits forms of development that would be acceptable within the Green Belt. The proposed development is fundamentally a sport and recreation-led scheme comprising outdoor sports facilities together with changing accommodation, community facilities, health and wellbeing facilities and the supporting infrastructure necessary to sustain those activities. Outdoor sport and recreation are forms of development generally regarded as appropriate within Green Belt locations and the principal use of the Site will remain sport, recreation and community activity. The proposed use is therefore not only compatible with the objectives of Policy D/10 but reflects the type of recreation-focused development that the policy expressly anticipates may be appropriate within Protected Open Land.
- 5.12 The direction of emerging local planning policy is also supportive of the proposed development. Emerging Policy PE10 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities) seeks to protect and enhance open spaces, sport and recreation facilities, recognising their role in supporting healthy communities, physical activity, biodiversity, wellbeing and social interaction. Significantly, the policy places emphasis on the quality, accessibility, multifunctionality and community value of recreational assets rather than solely their physical extent. The proposed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub aligns closely with these objectives by

retaining the Site in sporting, recreational and community use whilst delivering enhanced sporting provision, increased year-round usability, improved community infrastructure, health and wellbeing facilities and biodiversity enhancements. The proposals therefore provide a clear example of the type of investment in open space, sport and recreation facilities that the emerging Local Plan is seeking to promote.

- 5.13 Taken together, the development plan supports the continued enhancement of Bowlee as a strategic sporting, recreation and wellbeing destination. The proposals align with the objectives of Core Strategy Policies C6 and C8, Places for Everyone Policy JP-P7, emerging Local Plan Policy PE10, and UDP Policies RE/7(k) and D/10, all of which support the enhancement of sport, recreation, community and wellbeing facilities. The principle of the proposed use is therefore firmly established, with the key planning considerations relating to the detailed design, environmental effects and operation of the development rather than the acceptability of sport, recreation, health and wellbeing facilities in this location.

Recreation, Sports and Open Space

- 5.14 The application site is an established area of recreational open space currently accommodating football pitches, cricket provision, a community pavilion, children's play facilities and associated recreational infrastructure. The proposals therefore engage UDP Policy G/3, Core Strategy Policy C8 and Places for Everyone Policy JP-P7, each of which seeks to protect and enhance opportunities for sport, recreation and community participation.
- 5.15 Whilst the configuration of pitches changes and the number of traditional grass football pitches is reduced, the proposals cannot reasonably be characterised as a net loss of sporting or recreational provision. Instead, the development delivers a substantial enhancement in sporting capacity, quality, accessibility and resilience, supported by improved ancillary accommodation, drainage infrastructure, community access arrangements and cricket mitigation. The overall sporting value of the Site is therefore significantly enhanced.
- 5.16 The proposed development does not result in the loss of the site's existing recreational function. Rather, it represents a substantial investment in and enhancement of an existing sporting destination. Sport, recreation and community activity will remain the principal use of the site, with the proposals seeking to improve the quality, capacity, accessibility and resilience of provision through a coordinated programme of sporting, community and wellbeing improvements.
- 5.17 A key benefit of the proposals is the substantial improvement in sporting quality and capacity. The development will deliver three artificial grass pitches, retained and enhanced grass football pitches, replacement cricket facilities, comprehensive drainage improvements and modern ancillary accommodation. Together, these interventions create a substantially more resilient sporting facility capable of accommodating greater levels of participation and reducing disruption associated with poor weather and inadequate infrastructure.
- 5.18 The proposals also provide significant improvements in supporting infrastructure. New changing accommodation, officials' facilities, community space, health and wellbeing facilities, parking, lighting and supporting infrastructure will improve the attractiveness, accessibility and functionality of the Site for existing

and future users. These improvements address shortcomings in the existing facility and help secure the long-term viability of Bowlee as a strategic sporting destination.

- 5.19 Recreational benefits are not limited to football provision. The scheme includes replacement cricket practice facilities and safeguards opportunities for the future development of cricket provision, ensuring that the wider sporting function of the Site is maintained and enhanced. The proposals also broaden the recreational and wellbeing offer available at Bowlee through the provision of a Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub incorporating a 40-station gym, community meeting facilities and café space. These facilities will support a wider range of users than the existing site, creating opportunities for residents, sports participants and accompanying parents, carers and guardians to access health, fitness and community facilities whilst visiting the Site. Together, the enhanced sporting provision, wellbeing facilities and community spaces create a more diverse and inclusive destination capable of supporting a broader range of sporting, recreational, health and community activities than are currently available.
- 5.20 Community access also remains central to the development. The proposed partnership between Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC, together with the proposed community use arrangements, provides a framework for long-term programming, management and public access. The development has therefore been designed not only to improve facilities, but also to improve how those facilities are accessed, managed and utilised by the wider community.
- 5.21 Whilst the configuration of sporting facilities across the site will change, the submitted Sports Statement demonstrates that the overall sporting offer will be significantly enhanced. The proposals include three full-size 3G Artificial Grass Pitches, retained and improved grass football pitches, replacement cricket facilities, modern changing accommodation, a Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub, improved drainage infrastructure and supporting facilities. These improvements address longstanding issues relating to drainage, pitch reliability, capacity and supporting accommodation that currently constrain the site's effectiveness as a sporting destination.
- 5.22 Core Strategy Policy C8 supports the provision and enhancement of community, sport and leisure facilities that meet the needs of local communities and the wider Borough. The proposed development responds directly to this objective by reinforcing Bowlee's role as a strategic sporting and community destination and by improving the range, quality and accessibility of facilities available at the Site.
- 5.23 Similarly, Places for Everyone Policy JP-P7 seeks to protect and enhance a network of high-quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities. The proposals will strengthen the existing sporting function of Bowlee, support a wider range of users and activities, and secure a more resilient and sustainable sporting offer capable of responding to identified current and future needs.
- 5.24 UDP Policy G/3 recognises that development may be acceptable where it secures improvements to outdoor sports facilities or provides recreational facilities of greater benefit to the wider community than the open space affected. In this case, the recreational function of the Site is retained and enhanced, with the proposed development addressing existing constraints and improving the overall quality, functionality and community value of the facilities available at Bowlee.

- 5.25 Accordingly, the proposals align strongly with the objectives of UDP Policy G/3, Core Strategy Policy C8 and Places for Everyone Policy JP-P7. The development retains sport, recreation and community activity as the defining purpose of the Site whilst delivering a more comprehensive, accessible and sustainable sporting and wellbeing destination for Middleton and the wider Borough.
- 5.26 Overall, whilst the form and distribution of sporting provision on the Site will evolve, the effect of the proposals is a clear enhancement of the recreational value, sporting capacity, quality of facilities and community benefits associated with Bowlee. The development should therefore be viewed as the enhancement and modernisation of an established sporting destination rather than the loss of recreational open space.

Protected Open Land, Recreational Open Space and Greenspace Corridors

Existing Function and Value of the Site

- 5.27 The Site forms part of Bowlee Community Park and is designated as Protected Open Land (D/10), Protection of Existing Recreational Open Space (G/3) and Greenspace Corridor (G/8) within the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan. Whilst these designations recognise the importance of the Site as open land, it is equally important to acknowledge its existing role and character. The Site is not undeveloped countryside or natural greenspace. It is an established sporting destination containing football pitches, cricket provision, a community pavilion, a children's play area, access infrastructure and associated recreational facilities. The proposals should therefore be considered within the context of an existing developed recreational landscape rather than an undeveloped area of open land.
- 5.28 The Site provides a number of distinct functions and values including:
- recreational value through formal organised sport;
 - informal recreational value through walking and enjoyment of open space;
 - visual amenity value as part of the wider parkland setting;
 - health and wellbeing benefits associated with physical activity and recreation;
 - ecological and green infrastructure functions; and
 - contribution to the wider greenspace corridor network connecting Bowlee Community Park with surrounding open spaces.
- 5.29 The impact of the development on each of these functions is considered below.

Recreational Value

- 5.30 Recreational value represents the primary existing function of the Site. Bowlee is already used for football, cricket, community activities and wider recreation. The submitted Sports Statement demonstrates that the site currently underperforms due to drainage constraints, poor pitch reliability and ageing ancillary facilities. Of seven football pitches, only four are currently in regular use, whilst existing supporting infrastructure limits the sporting capacity and attractiveness of the Site.

- 5.31 The proposed development retains recreation as the principal function of the Site and significantly enhances its sporting role through improved grass pitch provision, three full-size 3G Artificial Grass Pitches, replacement cricket facilities, modern changing accommodation, a health and wellbeing hub and associated sporting infrastructure. The Sports Statement concludes that the proposals will improve sporting quality, increase capacity, support year-round use and respond directly to identified local need.
- 5.32 Whilst parts of the Site become more intensively used and additional built development is introduced, the overall recreational value of the Site is significantly enhanced rather than diminished. The Site will continue to function primarily as a destination for sport, recreation and community activity, but will do so with substantially improved quality, accessibility and capacity.

Health and Wellbeing Value

- 5.33 The proposals also strengthen the health and wellbeing role of the Site. In addition to enhanced sports provision, the development introduces a Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub incorporating a 40-station gym, community meeting facilities, café space, changing accommodation and supporting facilities. These elements broaden the function of the Site beyond organised sport and provide opportunities for a wider range of residents to engage in physical activity, health programmes and community initiatives.
- 5.34 The Sports Statement identifies anticipated growth across youth football, women and girls' football, disability football and wider community participation programmes. The development therefore increases the ability of the Site to support active lifestyles and wider public health objectives.

Visual and Landscape Value

- 5.35 The Site currently derives much of its visual value from its openness, expansive playing fields and relationship with the wider parkland landscape. The proposals inevitably introduce additional built form, hardstanding, lighting columns, fencing and associated infrastructure. However, the significance of these impacts is moderated by a number of factors.
- 5.36 Firstly, the Site is already characterised by formal recreational uses and associated infrastructure, including the existing pavilion, car park, access road, sports pitches, goalposts, fencing and recreational facilities. The development therefore occurs within an established sporting landscape rather than an undeveloped area of open countryside.
- 5.37 Secondly, the layout has been deliberately designed to cluster buildings, parking and associated infrastructure around the existing access corridor and established activity areas. This limits the spread of built development across the wider Site and helps retain the overall open character of the playing fields.
- 5.38 Thirdly, the proposals are supported by significant earthworks, landscape enhancements and biodiversity improvements. Reprofiting works improve the functionality of the sports facilities whilst landscape bunding provides a sustainable means of managing site-derived material, contributes to visual screening and supports habitat creation. Additional planting, habitat enhancement and landscape improvements further assist integration of the development into the wider parkland setting.

- 5.39 The Rochdale AFC building has also been positioned to work with the site's existing topography. By locating the building at pitch level, its apparent scale and visual prominence are reduced when viewed from the wider Site, helping to moderate the impact of what is necessarily a two-storey building. Access is provided via a series of ramps and steps from the central arrival area, allowing the development to work with, rather than against, the existing landform.
- 5.40 Whilst the proposals alter the visual appearance of parts of the Site, they retain its overall identity as a sporting and recreational landscape and are not considered to undermine the wider visual function of Bowlee Community Park. The development has been intentionally clustered around existing activity areas and access infrastructure, with landscape enhancement measures incorporated to ensure that the open character of the Site is retained and that buildings, parking and associated infrastructure sit appropriately within the wider parkland setting, consistent with the objectives of UDP Policy D/10.

Greenspace Corridor Function

- 5.41 Policy G/8 seeks to protect and enhance the role of designated Greenspace Corridors. The principal functions of the corridor at Bowlee relate to movement, recreation, landscape structure, accessibility and green infrastructure rather than the absence of development.
- 5.42 The development retains the fundamental continuity of the Greenspace Corridor. Existing pedestrian routes through the Site are retained and enhanced where appropriate, public access to the wider parkland remains available, and the proposals continue to provide opportunities for movement between surrounding residential areas, Bowlee Community Park and Heywood Old Road.
- 5.43 The layout has also been developed around the existing landscape structure of the Site. Retained vegetation, new planting, habitat creation and biodiversity enhancements contribute positively to the wider green infrastructure network and support the continued functioning of the corridor.
- 5.44 The proposals therefore do not sever the Greenspace Corridor nor fundamentally alter its ability to perform its recreational, accessibility, landscape and ecological functions.

Overall Open Space Assessment

- 5.45 The Site clearly performs an important open space function and the application appropriately recognises this through its design approach, landscape strategy and emphasis on retaining sport and recreation as the principal use. The development introduces additional built infrastructure, but does so in support of the primary sporting and recreational role of the Site rather than replacing it with an unrelated use.
- 5.46 When assessed against the recreational, visual, health and wellbeing, greenspace and community functions currently provided by the Site, the proposal is considered to result in a substantial enhancement of sporting provision and community infrastructure whilst retaining the key characteristics that underpin the Site's open space value. The development therefore accords with the objectives of Policies G/3, G/8 and D/10 when read as a whole, retaining the open and recreational character of Bowlee Community Park whilst securing significant investment in its long-term future.

- 5.47 The development therefore accords with the objectives of Policies G/3, G/8 and D/10 when read as a whole, retaining the open and recreational character of Bowlee Community Park whilst securing significant investment in its long-term future and enhancing the quality and functionality of the Site as a strategic recreation asset.
- 5.48 The proposals are also consistent with the broader objectives of Core Strategy Policy C6, Places for Everyone Policy JP-P7 and emerging Local Plan Policy PE10, which seek to enhance opportunities for recreation, physical activity, health and wellbeing whilst improving the quality, accessibility and community value of open spaces and recreation facilities.

Built Form

- 5.49 The proposed development is directly related to the established sporting and recreational use of the Site and comprises facilities necessary to support the continued operation and enhancement of Bowlee as a strategic Football and Community Wellbeing Hub. The proposals therefore represent an appropriate form of development within this location, providing sporting, recreation, health and community facilities that support and are intrinsically linked to the principal recreational use of the Site.
- 5.50 The proposed built development has been carefully designed and positioned to minimise its effects on the openness, landscape character and visual amenity of Bowlee Community Park. Development has been deliberately concentrated around the existing access corridor, parking areas and established activity nodes. This approach prevents the unnecessary spread of built form across the wider playing fields and retains the predominantly open character of the Site.
- 5.51 The replacement Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub occupies broadly the same part of the Site as the existing pavilion and represents the modernisation of an existing recreational facility rather than the introduction of significant new built form. Whilst providing enhanced community, sport, health and wellbeing facilities, the building remains closely associated with the existing developed core of the Site and does not result in substantial encroachment into previously undeveloped areas.
- 5.52 The Rochdale AFC building has been designed to respond positively to both the operational needs of the club and the character of the wider parkland setting. Although the building is two storeys in height, it has been positioned at pitch level within the reprofiled landform, reducing its apparent scale and visual prominence when viewed from across the wider Site. This approach enables the accommodation to be provided without creating an unduly dominant feature within the landscape.
- 5.53 The development also benefits from a combination of existing vegetation, new structural planting, habitat creation areas and landscape bunding formed from site-derived material. Together, these measures assist in integrating the development into its surroundings and moderating views of buildings, parking areas and associated infrastructure. As a result, the proposals are well contained within the existing recreational landscape and are appropriately screened from Heywood Old Road and the adjoining Green Belt.
- 5.54 Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to represent a landscape-led and contextually

appropriate form of development which retains the essential openness and recreational character of the Site whilst providing the facilities necessary to secure Bowlee's long-term future as a strategic sporting and community destination. The proposals therefore accord with the objectives of UDP Policy D/10, Core Strategy Policy P3 and PfE Policies JP-G1 and JP-P1.

Sport England Playing Fields Policy

- 5.55 The application site comprises an existing playing field for the purposes of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and Guidance. Sport England's policy confirms that it will oppose development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of, all or any part of a playing field unless, in Sport England's judgement, the development as a whole meets one or more of the five identified exceptions. The wording of the policy is important, as it requires the development to be considered as a whole and recognises that more than one exception may be engaged by a proposal.
- 5.56 The proposed development is not a conventional scheme involving the simple loss of playing field land to an unrelated form of development. It is a comprehensive sports-led investment project which retains sport as the central function of the Site and seeks to substantially improve the quality, reliability, capacity, accessibility and management of sporting provision at Bowlee. The submitted Rochdale Sports Statement Final - July 2026, prepared by FMG, explains that the project will transform the existing playing fields into a modern sports and wellbeing hub capable of supporting community participation, club development and elite football pathways.
- 5.57 The proposal does not rely solely on one Sport England exception. Rather, it incorporates a combination of ancillary sporting facilities, enhanced and re-provided outdoor sports provision, new indoor and outdoor sports facilities, artificial grass pitch provision, improved drainage, retained grass pitches, cricket mitigation, community use arrangements and long-term operational investment. It is therefore considered that the proposal engages the principles and objectives of Exceptions 2, 4 and 5, with the strongest support arising from Exception 5. The interaction between these exceptions should be given appropriate weight in assessing the overall sporting benefits of the scheme.

Exception 2: Ancillary Facilities Supporting the Principal Sporting Use

- 5.58 Exception 2 applies where proposed development is for ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field and does not adversely affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or their use. Sport England's guidance recognises that new or enhanced ancillary facilities can play an important role in helping people to become and stay active, improving the use and viability of playing fields for sport, enhancing the experience of existing users and making the playing field more attractive to potential new users. The guidance specifically identifies pavilions, changing accommodation, artificial sports lighting, access improvements and facilities encouraging alternatives to car travel as examples of ancillary facilities.
- 5.59 A substantial component of the Bowlee proposals falls squarely within this supporting role. The development includes new changing accommodation, officials' facilities, sports lighting, parking, cycle provision, storage, access improvements, drainage infrastructure and supporting accommodation required to allow the playing

pitches and wider sporting facilities to function effectively. These elements are not incidental or unrelated to the sporting use of the Site. They are integral to addressing the existing constraints at Bowlee and enabling the Site to operate as a modern, inclusive and reliable sports facility.

- 5.60 The submitted Sports Statement confirms that the development will provide two full-size community floodlit 3G Artificial Grass Pitches, one 3G Artificial Grass Pitch for Rochdale AFC community programmes, one 11v11 grass and goalkeeper training pitch for Rochdale AFC, retained community grass football pitches, cricket practice provision, additional parking, a new community sports pavilion with changing facilities, a 40-station health and fitness gym, community room and café, and a Rochdale AFC building. Many of these elements are either directly sporting facilities or ancillary facilities necessary to support the principal sporting use of the Site. Accordingly, the proposal strongly reflects the purpose of Exception 2 insofar as it delivers the supporting accommodation and infrastructure required to improve the attractiveness, accessibility and functionality of Bowlee as a playing field site.

Exception 4: Reprovision, Enhancement and Improved Management

- 5.61 Exception 4 relates to the replacement of playing field land with provision of equivalent or better quality, equivalent or greater quantity, in a suitable location and subject to equivalent or better accessibility and management arrangements. Sport England's guidance is clear that, strictly speaking, intensification or increased use of existing playing field land on the application site does not automatically meet Exception 4 where no new area of playing field is provided elsewhere.
- 5.62 The applicants therefore do not present the scheme as a simple or technical Exception 4 case. However, the principles underpinning Exception 4 are highly relevant to the planning judgement. The proposal retains sport on the Site and delivers substantial qualitative, functional and management-related improvements to the playing field offer. The development will reconfigure and enhance the existing playing field site through improved grass pitch provision, new artificial grass pitches, cricket practice reprovision, comprehensive drainage infrastructure, modern ancillary accommodation and community use arrangements.
- 5.63 The submitted sports evidence identifies Bowlee as an established playing field site with strategic scale, a large catchment and the ability to accommodate a managed multi-pitch hub. It explains that the proposal responds to known pitch quality issues, drainage constraints, unmet training demand and the need for reliable community 3G capacity. It further states that the development will retain sport on the Site whilst substantially improving quality, capacity and resilience, with the artificial grass pitches, retained grass provision, cricket accommodation and supporting pavilion facilities together providing a stronger and more flexible community sports offer.
- 5.64 This is directly relevant to the objectives of Exception 4. The scheme is not simply replacing provision on a like-for-like basis, nor is it seeking to justify the loss of playing field land without sporting mitigation. It is delivering a materially better sporting outcome on an established sports site. The proposed facilities will provide improved quality, greater reliability, better accessibility, enhanced management and a more resilient long-term sporting offer. Those factors should be afforded positive weight when considering the development against the intent and purpose of Sport England's playing fields policy.



Exception 5: Benefits to the Development of Sport

- 5.65 Exception 5 is the exception most closely aligned with the overall proposal. It applies where development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport and the benefit to the development of sport is sufficient to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of, or prejudice to the use of, an area of playing field. Sport England's guidance identifies a number of relevant considerations, including whether the facility meets an identified local or strategic need, secures sport-related benefits for the local community, helps meet sports development priorities, complies with relevant guidance and is accessible by alternatives to the private car.
- 5.66 The submitted Sports Statement demonstrates that the proposal responds to a clear and evidenced need for improved sports provision at Bowlee and across the wider Rochdale Borough. The need for Bowlee is not simply about replacing grass pitches with artificial surfaces. It is about providing reliable, year-round, higher-capacity football facilities capable of supporting training, match play and future growth. The Sports Statement refers to the FMG Feasibility Study, which identified a shortfall of 3 to 4 full-size 3G AGPs, with only five pitches having confirmed community access and only four being on the FA register.
- 5.67 The Sports Statement also identifies substantial existing and future demand. Consultation responses represented approximately 194 existing teams, with potential growth to approximately 392 teams, equivalent to a 102% increase, mainly across mini and youth football, with future growth also expected in women's, girls' and disability football. The Sports Statement records existing unmet demand, including thirteen clubs reporting unmet need, fourteen clubs reporting that players already travel 15 minutes or more to train, twelve clubs wanting to increase 3G training use at Council venues and eleven clubs wanting to increase 3G match use.
- 5.68 The proposal therefore directly responds to identified local and strategic need. It will deliver three 3G Artificial Grass Pitches in total, retained community grass football pitches, an 11v11 grass and goalkeeper training pitch, cricket practice provision, a community sports pavilion with changing accommodation, a 40-station health and fitness gym, community room and café, additional car parking and a Rochdale AFC building. This represents a substantial uplift in sporting infrastructure and will materially improve the ability of the Site to support training, match play, grassroots football, school use, community programmes and future participation growth.
- 5.69 The benefits of the development are both quantitative and qualitative. The proposals will increase the year-round usability of the Site, reduce weather-related cancellations, improve pitch quality, provide modern changing and ancillary accommodation, retain cricket provision, support grassroots clubs and leagues, improve facilities for schools and community users, and provide enhanced opportunities for women and girls, disabled players, young people and other groups who may face barriers to participation. These outcomes are closely aligned with Sport England's broader planning aim of enabling the already active to be more active and inactive people to become active, as well as its objectives to protect the right opportunities in the right places, enhance opportunities through better use of existing provision and provide new opportunities to meet current and future needs.
- 5.70 The Rochdale AFC element also forms part of the Exception 5 justification. The sports evidence records that

the Bowlee scheme responds to Rochdale AFC's requirement for a permanent training base and facilities to support its player pathway and community programmes. Consultation with the Club identified that Rochdale AFC lacked a permanent training ground and required better facilities for youth, women's and girls' football, disability programmes and community delivery. The evidence also records that Bowlee was considered the best strategic fit for these requirements and that the Rochdale AFC provision could be accommodated without displacing the community facilities previously identified through FMG's work.

- 5.71 Community access is central to the planning balance. Sport England's guidance states that community use is normally expected as part of the benefits that may enable a proposal to meet Exception 5, and that such use should be realised through a community use agreement or equivalent arrangement secured by condition or legal agreement. The proposed partnership between Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC and provides a clear basis for coordinated programming, community access, operational management and long-term use. On this basis, the scheme secures meaningful sport-related benefits for the local community rather than simply providing facilities for a single private user.

Overall Assessment Against Sport England Policy

- 5.72 The proposal should be assessed as a comprehensive sports-led enhancement of an existing playing field site. It does not fit neatly within a single exception because it is not a narrow or single-purpose development. Instead, it combines ancillary facilities, reconfigured and enhanced playing field provision, new indoor and outdoor sports facilities, artificial grass pitch provision, community access, cricket mitigation, management arrangements and significant investment in sports participation.
- 5.73 When considered as a whole, the development aligns strongly with the objectives of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy. It reflects the purpose of Exception 2 by providing the ancillary facilities required to support and improve the principal sporting use of the Site. It reflects the purpose of Exception 4 by securing materially enhanced provision, better quality, improved accessibility and strengthened management arrangements at an established and suitable playing field location. Most significantly, it aligns with Exception 5 by delivering indoor and outdoor sports facilities whose benefits to the development of sport clearly outweigh any detriment associated with the reconfiguration and development of parts of the existing playing field.
- 5.74 A rigid assessment which required the proposal to fall wholly and exclusively within a single exception would not properly reflect the scale, nature or sporting purpose of the development. Sport England's policy expressly refers to the development as a whole meeting one or more exceptions, and this proposal must therefore be considered in the round. The submitted Sports Statement demonstrates that Bowlee is not surplus to sporting requirements. Rather, it is a strategically important but constrained playing field site where investment is required to address drainage issues, poor reliability, limited ancillary accommodation, unmet demand and a shortage of accessible 3G provision.
- 5.75 Significant positive weight should therefore be given to the sporting benefits of the scheme. The development will retain sport as the central function of the Site, improve the quality and resilience of playing field provision, increase year-round sporting capacity, support community access, retain cricket provision, provide modern ancillary and wellbeing facilities, strengthen grassroots and community football, support



Rochdale AFC Community Trust programmes and deliver long-term benefits for Bowlee, Middleton and the wider Rochdale Borough. On this basis, the proposal is considered to accord with the overall objectives of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and should be supported in principle.

Sport England Exception	Assessment of Proposal	Overall Position
Exception 1 Surplus Provision	The proposal is not advanced on the basis that Bowlee is surplus to sporting requirements. The submitted Sports Statement identifies continuing demand for playing pitches and accessible 3G provision across Rochdale Borough and concludes that investment is required to address existing deficiencies and future participation growth.	Not relied upon
Exception 2 Ancillary Facilities Supporting the Principal Use of the Playing Field	The development incorporates a substantial package of ancillary sporting infrastructure including changing accommodation, officials' facilities, community sports accommodation, sports lighting, parking, cycle facilities, drainage infrastructure, storage and access improvements. These facilities directly support and enhance the principal sporting use of the Site and improve its attractiveness, accessibility and operational functionality.	Strong compliance
Exception 4 Replacement Provision	Although the proposals do not constitute a straightforward technical Exception 4 case, the scheme delivers many of the outcomes sought by the exception. The development retains sport on the Site whilst delivering improved grass pitch provision, three 3G pitches, replacement cricket facilities, comprehensive drainage improvements, enhanced ancillary accommodation, improved accessibility and long-term community use arrangements. These measures provide a materially improved sporting offer compared to the existing position.	Strong alignment with the objectives of Exception 4
Exception 5 Benefits to Sport	The proposal directly responds to identified local and strategic sporting need. The Sports Statement identifies a shortfall of 3-4 full-size 3G AGPs, substantial existing unmet demand and potential participation growth from approximately 194 to 392 teams. The scheme will provide three 3G pitches, enhanced grass pitches, cricket provision, modern pavilion facilities, community wellbeing facilities and associated sporting	Strong compliance

Sport England Exception	Assessment of Proposal	Overall Position
	infrastructure. The benefits to sport, physical activity and community participation are substantial and demonstrable.	
Community Use and Long-Term Management	The development is supported by a partnership between Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale AFC, providing a framework for community access, programming, management and long-term operation. Community use arrangements form an integral part of the proposals and ensure that the sporting benefits are secured for current and future users.	Significant positive weight
Overall Assessment	The proposal should be considered as a comprehensive sports-led enhancement of an existing playing field site. Whilst it does not rely upon a single exception in isolation, it demonstrates strong compliance with Exception 2 and Exception 5 and substantial alignment with the objectives underpinning Exception 4. Taken together, the development delivers a significant enhancement in sporting quality, capacity, resilience, accessibility and community benefit which should be afforded substantial positive weight in the planning balance.	Strong overall compliance with the intent and objectives of Sport England Playing Fields Policy

Site Layout and Spatial Organisation

- 5.76 The proposed layout has been developed around the existing strengths of the Site, retaining the established access via Heywood Old Road and concentrating the built form, parking and arrival functions within the centre of the development. This approach creates a clear organisational structure, allowing the extensive playing pitches and open recreational areas to remain the dominant land use across the wider Site whilst ensuring that changing accommodation, community facilities, parking and supporting infrastructure are centrally located and easily accessible to both community users and Rochdale AFC participants.
- 5.77 The arrangement of pitches, buildings and supporting infrastructure has been informed by both operational requirements and landscape considerations. The Rochdale AFC training facilities are located to the south of the central arrival area, whilst the RBC community sports facilities are located to the north and east. This arrangement allows the different user groups to operate effectively whilst sharing infrastructure, parking and community facilities where appropriate. The layout also enables the two organisations to operate as part of a coordinated sports hub whilst maintaining distinct operational areas where required.

Relationship Between the Buildings

- 5.78 The Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub and the Rochdale AFC facility have been positioned to create the

heart of the development. Rather than operating as isolated buildings within a wider sports complex, they are deliberately arranged around a shared pedestrian-focused arrival space which acts as the principal gateway, meeting point and orientation point for visitors. The two buildings have been positioned at the heart of the development and arranged around a shared pedestrian-focused public space, creating a clear focal point for arrival, circulation and community activity. Whilst retaining distinct operational functions and identities, the buildings maintain a strong visual relationship with one another and are unified through a common landscape framework and public realm.

- 5.79 Although the buildings have been designed by separate architectural teams and respond to different operational requirements, they have been developed as complementary elements of a single masterplan. Both facilities are set within a shared landscape framework, are connected by common arrival and circulation spaces and adopt a design approach which emphasises accessibility, active frontages, clear entrances and a strong relationship with the surrounding pitches and parkland. Whilst the buildings necessarily differ in scale, architectural expression, construction requirements and budget, both have been designed to sit within a common landscape setting and operate as part of a coordinated masterplan centred around shared arrival spaces, parking, community infrastructure and sporting facilities.

Appearance and Legibility

- 5.80 The layout has been developed around a clear hierarchy of arrival, movement and activity spaces, with the two principal buildings acting as key destination points within the wider site. Visitors arriving from Heywood Old Road are directed towards the central parking and arrival area, from which both the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub and the Rochdale AFC facility are clearly identifiable and readily accessible. The distinct architectural treatment of each building assists users in understanding the different functions operating within the site whilst maintaining a coherent relationship within the wider masterplan.
- 5.81 In particular, the Rochdale AFC facility adopts a stronger visual identity reflecting the Club's established branding and colours, providing a readily recognisable focal point for players and visitors. The RBC Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub adopts a more civic and community-focused character reflecting its broader public role. Together, these approaches help create a clear distinction between the respective facilities whilst allowing them to operate as part of a single sporting and community destination.
- 5.82 Detailed signage, branding and any future advertising proposals do not form part of the current application and would be subject to separate assessment where required. Nevertheless, the buildings have been designed to provide clear points of arrival and a legible spatial structure which assists navigation throughout the site.

Access, Wayfinding and Visitor Experience

- 5.83 A key component of the design approach has been the creation of a clear and welcoming arrival experience centred around a shared public realm linking the two principal buildings, sports facilities and wider parkland. The layout has been organised around the existing point of access from Heywood Old Road, with parking, pedestrian routes and building entrances arranged to provide clear routes through the site and maintain

strong connections with Bowlee Community Park.

- 5.84 The existing access arrangements have been enhanced through a clearer hierarchy of movement, shared arrival spaces and improved pedestrian connections across the Site. Visitors arriving from Heywood Old Road are directed towards a central arrival area, from which both buildings, the principal pitches, the retained play space and wider routes into Bowlee Community Park are clearly visible and easily understood.
- 5.85 The layout and architectural design have also been developed to assist navigation and orientation throughout the site. Active uses have been positioned on key frontages, helping visitors to understand the function of each building and identify principal entrances and destinations. Within the Community Sports and Wellbeing Hub, the fitness suite, café and community spaces are expressed through extensive glazing facing the arrival area, car park and play facilities, creating active frontages and providing visual cues for visitors approaching the building. The principal entrance is further emphasised through a clearly defined canopy and reception area, establishing an obvious point of arrival and orientation.
- 5.86 The development has been designed to improve accessibility and inclusivity for all users. While the Rochdale AFC facility is positioned at pitch level and accessed via a combination of ramps and steps responding to the site's topography, the wider layout has sought to provide clear and legible routes between the buildings, playing pitches and surrounding parkland. Existing public routes through the Site are retained and enhanced, maintaining connections between surrounding neighbourhoods and Bowlee Community Park.
- 5.87 The development seeks to build upon the site's existing role as a community destination and improve connections between the sports hub, the wider Bowlee Community Park and surrounding residential neighbourhoods. Existing pedestrian routes through the Site are retained and enhanced where appropriate, ensuring continued public access through the park and maintaining established connections between Langley, Middleton, Bowlee Community Park and the wider recreational network.
- 5.88 Walking, wheeling and cycling form an important component of the movement strategy. The proposed layout retains the existing access arrangements from Heywood Old Road whilst providing improved pedestrian routes, cycle parking and clear connections between the buildings, pitches, parking areas and wider community park. The proposals therefore support sustainable travel choices and reinforce the role of Bowlee as an accessible sporting, recreational and community destination serving both local residents and the wider Borough.

Relationship with Bowlee Community Park and the Surrounding Area

- 5.89 The proposals have been developed to function as an extension of the wider Bowlee Community Park rather than a self-contained sports complex. Existing public access routes are retained, improved and better connected to the new facilities, whilst the landscape strategy seeks to reinforce the relationship between formal sporting provision and the wider recreational landscape. The development therefore supports both organised sport and informal recreation, maintaining strong physical and visual connections with the surrounding parkland.

- 5.90 The layout also responds positively to the surrounding community. The retained play provision, community facilities, gym, café and public realm spaces ensure that the Site continues to serve a broad range of users extending beyond formal sports participants. The development therefore strengthens the Site's role as a wider community destination serving surrounding residential neighbourhoods, Edgar Wood Academy and users of the wider parkland network.

Landscape-Led Design

- 5.91 The overall site layout has been informed by a landscape-led design approach. Existing mature trees, woodland belts and green corridors have been retained wherever possible and form the framework around which the sporting facilities have been organised. New planting, ecological bunding, biodiversity enhancements, sustainable drainage features and public realm improvements have been integrated into the masterplan to ensure that sport, recreation, ecology and landscape character operate together as a cohesive whole. The resulting development is therefore intended not simply as a collection of buildings and pitches, but as a long-term sporting, recreational and community landscape embedded within the wider setting of Bowlee Community Park.

Summary

- 5.92 The proposed site layout, movement strategy and design approach have been developed through a comprehensive masterplanning process which balances the operational requirements of community sport, professional football, recreation and wellbeing uses with the site's wider landscape, environmental and community functions. The arrangement of buildings, pitches, public realm, parking and landscape infrastructure creates a clear organisational structure centred around a shared arrival space and community hub, whilst ensuring that the extensive playing fields and open recreational areas remain the dominant land use across the wider Site.
- 5.93 The proposals also demonstrate a strong commitment to place-making, accessibility and connectivity. Existing pedestrian routes are retained and enhanced, walking, wheeling and cycling connections are maintained, and the development continues to function as an accessible destination for both formal sport and informal recreation. The layout strengthens relationships between the sporting facilities, the wider Bowlee Community Park, surrounding residential neighbourhoods, Edgar Wood Academy and the wider recreational network, ensuring that the Site functions as an integrated community destination rather than a standalone sports complex.
- 5.94 In this regard, the development accords with Core Strategy Policy P3 (Improving Design of Place) through the delivery of a coherent, legible and landscape-led development that responds positively to its parkland setting, and Core Strategy Policy P4 (Improving Sustainable Transport) through the retention and enhancement of pedestrian routes, improved walking, wheeling and cycling connectivity, and the promotion of sustainable access to community facilities. The proposals also support the objectives of Core Strategy Policy C6 (Improving Health and Wellbeing) and Policy C8 (Improving Community, Sport and Leisure Facilities) through the creation of an accessible sporting, recreational and wellbeing destination serving local communities and the wider Borough.

- 5.95 The development is similarly aligned with the objectives of the adopted Places for Everyone Plan, including Policy JP-P1 (Sustainable Places), which promotes connected and accessible development, Policy JP-G1 (Creating a Healthy Green Infrastructure Network), which seeks to integrate recreation, landscape, biodiversity and green infrastructure, and Policy JP-P7 (Sport and Recreation Facilities), which supports the enhancement of established sporting destinations and increased opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity. The proposals therefore represent a coherent, landscape-led and accessible sporting and community destination which responds positively to its context, strengthens connections with the wider community park and surrounding neighbourhoods, and reinforces the long-term recreational, health and wellbeing role of Bowlee Community Park.
- 5.96 The proposals are also consistent with the direction of emerging local planning policy. In particular, Draft Local Plan Policy PE10 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities) seeks to enhance the quality, accessibility and multifunctional value of open spaces and recreation assets, whilst Policy PE3 (Health and Wellbeing) and Policy PE6 (Delivering Services and Facilities in the Community) support developments that improve opportunities for physical activity, community participation and access to local facilities. Through the creation of an integrated sporting, recreational and wellbeing destination embedded within the wider landscape framework of Bowlee Community Park, the proposals align closely with these objectives.

Landscaping and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.97 The landscape strategy has been developed as a fundamental component of the masterplan and provides the framework around which the sporting, community and recreational elements of the scheme have been organised. Existing mature trees, woodland belts and green corridors have been retained wherever practicable and continue to define the character of the Site, reinforce its relationship with Bowlee Community Park and provide an important visual and ecological buffer to the surrounding area. Existing public routes through the park are retained and integrated into the development.
- 5.98 The proposals incorporate extensive landscape enhancements including new structural tree planting, native hedgerows, species-rich grassland, ecological planting, attenuation features and habitat creation areas. Particular emphasis has been placed on strengthening the existing green framework, improving ecological connectivity and ensuring that the sports hub remains embedded within the wider parkland setting. New planting and ecological bunding formed from site-derived material will help soften views into the development from the surrounding areas, reinforce screening along the Heywood Old Road frontage and assist in integrating the new buildings, pitches and associated infrastructure into the landscape. Existing tree belts and vegetation along the Heywood Old Road frontage are largely retained and supplemented by additional tree planting, hedgerow planting and ecological landscape features, ensuring that the site's established green edge and screening function are maintained and enhanced.
- 5.99 Biodiversity considerations have informed the design process throughout the evolution of the scheme. The proposals maximise opportunities for habitat retention and enhancement within the Site through new tree planting, species-rich grassland, native hedgerow planting, sustainable drainage features, scrub planting, ecological bunding and wider landscape improvements. However, the operational requirements associated

with delivering a strategic football and community wellbeing hub necessarily constrain the extent of habitat creation that can be achieved within the application boundary. The submitted Biodiversity Metric assessment confirms that, whilst significant on-site enhancements are proposed, the development will result in a net loss of 1.89 habitat units (-8.15%) and a gain of 0.34 hedgerow units (10.64%). Hedgerow net gain requirements are therefore achieved on-site, but a residual deficit of 4.20 habitat units remains against the statutory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement.

- 5.100 The submitted Biodiversity Metric Report concludes that the mitigation hierarchy has been followed and that the site layout and landscape strategy have been designed to maximise on-site biodiversity enhancements where practicable whilst retaining the functional role of the Site as a sports and training facility. The residual deficit arises principally from the replacement of existing grassland with enhanced sporting infrastructure and associated facilities. In these circumstances, the Biodiversity Net Gain strategy proposes that the outstanding 4.20 habitat unit deficit will be secured through off-site compensation delivered via a local habitat bank. This approach will ensure that the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements are achieved whilst also satisfying the habitat trading rules of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- 5.101 Taken together, the landscape and biodiversity proposals deliver substantial environmental improvements both within and beyond the Site. On-site enhancements include new tree planting, species-rich grassland, native hedgerow planting, sustainable drainage features, ecological planting and strengthened green infrastructure, whilst the habitat bank delivers wider habitat creation and ecological enhancement at a strategic scale. The proposals therefore accord with Core Strategy Policy P3 (Improving Design of Place) through their landscape-led design approach, Core Strategy Policy C6 (Improving Health and Wellbeing) through enhanced access to high-quality green space and recreation opportunities, and Places for Everyone Policy JP-G1 (Creating a Healthy Green Infrastructure Network) through the retention, enhancement and strengthening of green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecological connectivity. The proposals are also consistent with Places for Everyone Policies JP-P1 (Sustainable Places) and JP-P7 (Sport and Recreation Facilities) and align closely with the objectives of emerging Draft Local Plan Policy PE10 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities), which seeks to enhance the quality, accessibility and multifunctional value of open spaces and recreation assets.

Highways and Parking

- 5.102 The application is supported by a Transport Statement which assesses the accessibility of the Site, the suitability of the proposed access arrangements and the impact of the development on the local highway network. The development will continue to utilise the existing all-modes access from Heywood Old Road, which benefits from adequate visibility and an established connection to the local highway network. The access has been demonstrated to safely accommodate the anticipated vehicle movements associated with the development, whilst active travel users will continue to benefit from existing routes through Bowlee Community Park and a new dedicated pedestrian access from Heywood Old Road. Within the Site, a clear hierarchy of pedestrian routes, crossings and circulation spaces has been incorporated to support safe and convenient movement between the buildings, pitches, parking areas and wider parkland. The Transport

Statement also concludes that there are no identified highway safety issues associated with the surrounding road network and that the proposed development will not materially alter the operational characteristics of the local highway network.

- 5.103 The proposals include a new formalised parking area providing 250 car parking spaces, including 14 accessible spaces located close to the principal building entrances, with provision for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and secure cycle parking for 20 bicycles. Parking provision has been informed by an assessment of anticipated demand associated with the community sports hub, fitness facilities and Rochdale AFC operations. As noted in the Transport Statement, there are no specific parking standards within the development plan for a proposed use of this nature and that parking provision must therefore be considered on its individual merits having regard to the scale, operation and anticipated patterns of use associated with the development.
- 5.104 The submitted parking accumulation assessment within the Transport Statement indicates a peak parking demand of approximately 170 spaces, demonstrating that the proposed parking provision provides a suitable level of capacity whilst retaining operational flexibility. The development also incorporates dedicated motorcycle parking, servicing arrangements and internal circulation routes, with vehicle tracking confirming that the Site can safely accommodate servicing, maintenance and refuse vehicles. Accordingly, the Transport Statement concludes that the proposals provide safe and suitable access for all users, support sustainable travel opportunities and would not give rise to a severe impact on the highway network.
- 5.105 In this regard, the proposals accord with Core Strategy Policy P4 (Improving Sustainable Transport) through the promotion of walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport accessibility, whilst also providing safe and appropriate vehicular access and parking provision. The development is also consistent with Places for Everyone Policy JP-P1 (Sustainable Places) through the delivery of a well-connected and accessible development which promotes sustainable travel choices whilst ensuring that the operational requirements of the sports and wellbeing hub can be accommodated safely and efficiently.

Amenity

- 5.106 The proposed development has been designed with careful regard to the amenity of surrounding residents and users of Bowlee Community Park. Whilst the Site is located within an established recreational destination and is surrounded principally by open land, parkland and educational uses, the design process has nevertheless sought to minimise potential impacts associated with activity, lighting and visual change. The built development, artificial grass pitches and areas of greatest activity have been concentrated within the existing developed core of the Site, allowing existing buffer areas, retained vegetation and landscape features to continue to provide separation from neighbouring residential properties along Heywood Old Road and the wider parkland environment. Existing tree belts, hedgerows and landscape features along the western boundary are largely retained and supplemented through additional planting and habitat creation measures, helping to maintain screening, soften views of the development and retain the established green edge to Heywood Old Road.

- 5.107 The operational requirements of the proposed Football and Community Wellbeing Hub, including the provision of artificial grass pitches and associated lighting, have been considered as part of the design process. The layout has sought to balance the delivery of enhanced year-round sporting facilities with the need to protect neighbouring amenity and the character of the surrounding parkland. The artificial grass pitches, buildings and associated infrastructure have been positioned within an established sporting landscape and are supported by landscape buffers, planting and topographical changes which assist in moderating their wider effects. The Site already functions as a destination for organised sport and recreation and the proposals retain this primary role whilst modernising facilities and improving sporting capacity. In this context, the development is not expected to give rise to unacceptable amenity impacts and is considered to provide an appropriate balance between the delivery of significant sporting, community and wellbeing benefits and the protection of neighbouring residential amenity and the enjoyment of Bowlee Community Park.
- 5.108 Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to safeguard the residential amenity and the amenity of users of Bowlee Community Park and the wider area. The scheme has been designed to minimise potential impacts through the careful siting of buildings, pitches, lighting and associated infrastructure, the retention and enhancement of landscape buffers, and the concentration of development within the existing sporting core of the Site. In this regard, the proposals accord with Core Strategy Policy P3 (Improving Design of Place), which seeks high quality development that responds positively to local context and protects amenity, together with Places for Everyone Policy JP-P1 (Sustainable Places), which requires development to create attractive, safe and well-designed places, and Policy JP-G1 (Creating a Healthy Green Infrastructure Network), which seeks to safeguard the recreational, landscape and environmental value of green infrastructure assets. The proposals therefore deliver significant sporting, recreation, health and community benefits without giving rise to any significant detrimental impacts on surrounding properties, neighbouring land uses or users of the wider parkland environment.

Technical Considerations

Lighting

- 5.109 A Lighting Design and Planning Report has been prepared by Kowski Consulting in support of the planning application for the installation of floodlighting at the application site.
- 5.110 The report addresses the specific requirements of the Local Planning Authority as set out in pre-application advice and demonstrates compliance with current industry guidance and relevant British Standards.
- 5.111 The proposed scheme provides high-performance LED floodlighting to the pitches on site, with all luminaires mounted on columns of approximately 15m in height. A range of optics has been selected to optimise pitch illuminance whilst strictly controlling light spill, glare and obtrusive light.
- 5.112 A maintenance factor (MF) of 1.0 has been applied to all sports pitch calculations. For amenity and car park areas, a maintenance factor of 0.9 has been applied, reflecting standard LED lumen depreciation over a three-year cleaning cycle.



- 5.113 Luminaire aiming angles have been carefully optimised to maximise pitch illuminance whilst minimising glare and overspill beyond the site boundary.
- 5.114 The Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub is located within a semi-rural / suburban fringe setting surrounded predominantly by residential properties, open space and standard domestic and street lighting. There are no significant commercial or retail lighting sources in the immediate vicinity. On this basis, the site has been assessed against the Environmental Zone E2 limits set out within ILP GN01:2021, representing a suitably robust and conservative approach.
- 5.115 All calculations represent the worst-case scenario, namely the installation operating at 100% output when first commissioned and prior to any reduction in output associated with lamp depreciation.
- 5.116 Calculations have been undertaken for all surrounding residential receptors at a height of 5m on the façade facing the installation, in accordance with ILP GN01:2021 methodology.
- 5.117 Of the nine residential receptor locations assessed for vertical illuminance (Ev), all achieved a PASS against the ILP GN01:2021 pre-curfew limit of 10 lux for Environmental Zone E2.
- 5.118 For calculations assessing source intensity (cd) at neighbouring properties, five of the nine receptor locations achieved a PASS at the initial assessment stage. At the remaining four receptor locations, rear shields (cowls) have been incorporated into the lighting design. Whilst isolated maximum values exceeded the E2 threshold at a limited number of calculation points immediately adjacent to lighting columns, average values remained within acceptable limits and the incorporation of cowls ensures compliance with the applicable standards.
- 5.119 In addition to the vertical illuminance assessment, source intensity calculations have been undertaken at a number of observer positions around the site perimeter to assess potential glare and the perceived brightness of the lighting installation when viewed from surrounding areas.
- 5.120 Where required, luminaire rear shields have been incorporated into the design at specification stage to ensure compliance with the relevant standards. No post-installation intervention is anticipated to be necessary, although additional shielding could be introduced if required following commissioning.
- 5.121 The lighting strategy has been specifically developed to minimise impacts on neighbouring residential properties and the wider parkland setting. The submitted assessment demonstrates that all residential receptor locations achieve compliance with the applicable Environmental Zone E2 standards and that the proposed floodlighting would not result in unacceptable light intrusion or harm to residential amenity.
- 5.122 The design incorporates a range of mitigation measures including reduced-spill optics on boundary columns, carefully controlled aiming angles and rear shields where required. The submitted assessment confirms that the floodlighting complies with the requirements of ILP GN01:2021 and that all residential receptor locations achieve the relevant obtrusive light standards.
- 5.123 The submitted lux contour plans demonstrate that light spill is effectively contained within the Site. The 1 lux contour remains within the application boundary, whilst the 5 lux contour does not extend to neighbouring residential properties. Together with the use of full cut-off luminaires, reduced-spill optics and shielding

measures, the lighting scheme has been designed to minimise impacts on residential amenity and the surrounding parkland setting.

- 5.124 The proposed luminaires have an Upward Light Output Ratio (ULOR) of 0%, eliminating direct upward light and minimising sky glow. The lighting design has also been developed in accordance with the recommendations of the ecological assessment through the use of carefully controlled optics, aiming angles and shielding measures which minimise unnecessary illumination beyond the playing areas. This assists in reducing light spill into retained vegetation and other ecologically sensitive areas of the Site.
- 5.125 All sports floodlighting will be extinguished by 23:00, with only low-level amenity and security lighting remaining operational where required. In combination with the lighting controls and mitigation measures embedded within the design, this ensures that the operational effects of the lighting scheme are appropriately controlled and that there would be no significant adverse effects on residential amenity, the character of the surrounding open spaces or ecological receptors.
- 5.126 Based on the lighting design and assessments presented in the report, Kowski Consulting concludes that the proposed floodlighting installation is suitable for the proposed location and use and complies with the planning requirements set out by the Local Planning Authority in respect of light levels, operating hours and environmental effects.
- 5.127 Full details of the proposed lighting design, including luminaire specifications, lighting levels and installation details, are provided within the Lighting Design and Planning Report. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with PfE Policies JP-S1, JP-P1 and JP-G8, Core Strategy Policies EN15 and DM1, and Section 15 of the NPPF, which seek to secure high quality development that protects residential amenity, minimises environmental impacts and safeguards biodiversity and ecological networks.

Noise Impact Assessment

- 5.128 The Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) has been prepared by Jameson Acoustics to assess the potential noise impacts generated by the proposed development when operational in accordance with BS 7445 and BS 4142.
- 5.129 The Site currently comprises an established sporting and recreational destination and is located within an area containing a range of community, educational and recreational uses. The Noise Impact Assessment recognises that the proposed development represents an enhancement and intensification of an existing sporting use and has therefore assessed impacts having regard to the prevailing acoustic environment. Baseline noise surveys identified existing influences from road traffic and established ambient noise conditions at nearby receptors, which informed the adoption of site-specific assessment criteria. The assessment therefore considers the proposals within the context of the existing noise environment rather than as the introduction of a wholly new source of noise into an otherwise quiet location.
- 5.130 It is therefore recommended that in cases where noise conditions in the general vicinity of the dwelling's outdoor living area or façade are already greater than the threshold for serious annoyance (55 dB LAeq), it would be reasonable to set 55 dB LAeq as the noise limit from the use of the sports pitches. Where it falls

below this threshold, a limit of 50 dB LAeq would be more sensible, to ensure alignment with the level for onset of moderate annoyance and Sports England guidance.

- 5.131 Together with a review of absolute noise limits at residential boundaries, the change in ambient LAeq noise level based on surveyed baseline (existing) noise levels representative of conditions at each noise sensitive receptor was considered, with a maximum change in noise level of +3 dB considered sensible.
- 5.132 For plant noise emissions (from the operation of the proposed building), limits shall be set so as not to exceed the existing background noise level in line with BS 4142.
- 5.133 Overall, the assessment finds that acceptable noise levels from the operation of the sports pitches can be achieved at all nearby noise sensitive receptors. However, for a single dwelling to the south-west (456nr Heywood Old Rd), it is recommended that a solid acoustic barrier (e.g. timber fence) is erected along the boundary of the dwelling's rear garden to ensure the proposed noise limit can be achieved across the full garden space.
- 5.134 Overall, the assessment finds that acceptable noise levels from the operation of the sports pitches can be achieved at all nearby noise sensitive receptors. A minor exceedance of up to approximately 1 dB above the proposed criterion was identified within part of the rear garden area of 456 Heywood Old Road. To address this, the assessment recommends the installation of a 2.0m high imperforate acoustic barrier along the relevant garden boundary. A post-mitigation assessment confirms that the proposed noise limits would then be achieved across the full garden area and at all assessed receptors.
- 5.135 In relation to the operation of the proposed buildings, noise emission limits have been proposed for any new items of external fixed plant.
- 5.136 The assessment approach is consistent with Sport England's guidance on Artificial Grass Pitch acoustics, which recognises that site-specific circumstances, existing ambient noise levels and the character of surrounding uses should be taken into account when assessing potential impacts. Whilst the proposed development does not seek to achieve a blanket 50 dB LAeq criterion at all receptors, the assessment demonstrates that the adopted criteria are appropriate having regard to the prevailing baseline noise environment and that residual impacts would remain acceptable.
- 5.137 Subject to the implementation of the recommended acoustic barrier and plant noise limits, the assessment concludes that the proposed development can operate without giving rise to unacceptable impacts on nearby residential properties, educational uses or users of surrounding open spaces. The proposals are therefore considered to accord with PfE Policy JP-P1, Core Strategy Policy G9, UDP Policy EM/3 and Section 14 of the NPPF.

Ecology and Bats

- 5.138 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) Report has been prepared by E3P and submitted as part of this application.
- 5.139 The site was found to comprise modified grassland sports fields, other neutral grassland, ruderal/ephemeral,

bramble scrub, mixed scrub, introduced shrub, tall forbs, treelines, hedgerows and individual trees. It was also found to have a number of potential ecological constraints.

- 5.140 Mitigation measures have also been recommended as part of the proposal, mainly concerning issues including pollution prevention, clearance works, lighting design, ecological supervision for removal of specific trees, badger walkover and precautionary working methods, retention of vegetation where possible and areas of ragwort, precautionary working methods for reptiles, and the eradication of invasive species.
- 5.141 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal confirms that no statutory nature conservation designations will be directly affected by the proposed development. The nearby Site of Biological Importance (SBI) is retained and protected, with no direct impacts identified. The assessment also found no evidence of badger setts within the Site, although precautionary pre-construction walkover surveys are recommended to confirm this position prior to the commencement of works.
- 5.142 The assessment identifies potential habitat for reptiles, nesting birds and other common wildlife species associated with areas of grassland, scrub, hedgerows and trees. Appropriate mitigation measures have therefore been incorporated into the proposals, including ecological supervision where required, vegetation retention where practicable, precautionary working methods, sensitive site clearance procedures and invasive species management. Subject to the implementation of these measures, the assessment concludes that significant adverse ecological effects can be avoided.
- 5.143 In addition to mitigation, the proposals incorporate ecological enhancement measures including new habitat creation, native planting, biodiversity-focused landscaping and the provision of bat and bird boxes. These measures will help strengthen ecological connectivity across the Site and support the wider green infrastructure network associated with Bowlee Community Park.
- 5.144 A Bat Emergence Survey Report and Interim Bat Activity Survey Report were also undertaken by E3P.
- 5.145 The Emergence Survey confirmed that common and widespread species were identified utilising the site for foraging and commuting, including common pipistrelle, and noctule bat. In addition, the occasional occurrences of Nathusius' pipistrelle were identified during the survey.
- 5.146 No bats were observed emerging from the surveyed building and as such, it can be concluded that no bats are roosting within the building. Therefore, no further assessment, mitigation or Natural England Bat licencing is required for works to proceed.
- 5.147 The Bat Activity Survey identified the site as having moderate levels of bat activity, with common pipistrelle recorded foraging and commuting throughout the Site. The highest levels of activity were recorded along the southwestern site boundary associated with treelines TL1 and TL6 and introduced shrub planting, together with areas of mixed scrub along the eastern boundary. The separate Bat Emergence Survey also recorded noctule and occasional Nathusius' pipistrelle utilising the Site for foraging and commuting. Collectively, the survey work confirms that the Site provides habitat for common and widespread bat species, particularly in association with retained tree lines, scrub and boundary vegetation.

- 5.148 Recommendations made include additional species enhancements such as proposed bat boxes on the new building, providing roosting opportunities for bat species, and production of a Lighting Design by a competent professional to ensure sensitivity to retained features and no disturbance within areas habited by bat species.
- 5.149 In addition to the survey work submitted with the application, further ecological survey work is currently being undertaken. The Interim Bat Activity Survey Report confirms that a further two Night-time Bat Walkover Surveys are scheduled to be completed during the 2026 survey season prior to determination of the Proposed Development, following which the bat activity assessment will be finalised. The results of these surveys, together with any updated recommendations or mitigation measures, will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority during the determination of the application.
- 5.150 Full details can be found in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report, Bat Emergence Survey Report, and Interim Bat Activity Survey Report, prepared by E3P.
- 5.151 The proposals are therefore in line with: PfE Policies JP-S1 and -G8; CS Policies EN 15 and DM 1; and Section 15 of the NPPF.

Arboricultural Impact Assessment

- 5.152 The Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been prepared by E3P, in line with BS 5837:2012, and submitted as part of this application.
- 5.153 The tree survey schedule recorded a total of 103no. individual trees, 16no. groups of trees and 3no. hedgerows on and adjacent to the site. These included 35no. individual trees and 4no. groups graded Category B (trees of moderate value), 65no. individual trees, 12no. groups of trees, and 3no. hedgerows graded Category C (trees of low value). 3no. individual trees were graded Category U (trees unsuitable for retention). No veteran, ancient trees and Ancient Woodland were recorded within or adjacent to the site.
- 5.154 The construction of the development as proposed will require the removal of 12no. individual trees (Category B), 1no. tree group (Category C), 1no. hedgerow and part removal of 1no. hedgerow (Category C).
- 5.155 Pruning works are anticipated to be required to 7no. individual trees and 1no. tree group in order to facilitate the proposed development whilst retaining these arboricultural features. The nature and extent of the works are set out within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment and would be undertaken in accordance with recognised arboricultural best practice.
- 5.156 Due to the incorporation of hard surfacing such as access roads, footpaths and parking bays as part of the proposed development, there will be a level of encroachment into the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of 8no. retained trees. No adverse impacts are anticipated to the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of 5no. of these trees due to their present location beneath the existing hardstanding. Mitigation for hard surfacing will require an above-ground subbase construction method be used in the areas of RPA encroachment to avoid the need for excavation and subsequent root damage and loss within retained trees RPAs.
- 5.157 The proposals are therefore considered to be in accordance with PfE Policies JP-P1 and JP-G1, Core Strategy



Policy P3, and Section 15 of the NPPF.

Air Quality Assessment

- 5.158 An Air Quality Assessment has been prepared by Redmore Environmental to assess the potential impacts associated with fugitive dust emissions during construction, road transport emissions during the operational phase of the proposed development and identify requirements for relevant mitigation measures.
- 5.159 It is considered that the proposals have the potential to cause air quality impacts at sensitive locations during the construction and operational phases.
- 5.160 Potential impacts during the construction phase may occur as a result of fugitive dust emissions from the site, which have been assessed in accordance with the IAQM methodology. Subject to implementation of site-specific dust control measures, the potential air quality impacts from demolition, earthworks, constructions and trackout activities are predicted to be not significant.
- 5.161 Potential impacts during the operational phase of the proposals may occur due to road traffic exhaust emissions associated with vehicles travelling to and from the site. The resultant highway emissions from the highway network were assessed via dispersion modelling, comparing the predicted pollutant concentrations at sensitive locations with and without the development in place. Results were later verified using local monitoring data.
- 5.162 The results of the dispersion modelling assessment predicted that impacts on annual mean NO₂, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} concentrations as a result of traffic generated by the development were negligible at all receptors.
- 5.163 Furthermore, in accordance with the IAQM guidance and following consideration of relevant issues, residual impacts as a result of the operation of the development were considered to be not significant.
- 5.164 Based on the assessment results, air quality factors are not considered a constraint to planning consent for the development subject to the implementation of the mitigation measures identified within the Air Quality Assessment, including construction dust suppression measures, electric vehicle charging provision, secure cycle parking and measures which support sustainable travel choices.
- 5.165 Full details can be found in the Air Quality Assessment, prepared by Redmore Environmental.
- 5.166 The proposals are therefore in line with PfE Policies JP-S5, JP-P6, JP-S1; CS Policies G9, DM1, DM2; and Section 15 of the NPPF.

Groundworks and Phase 1 Desk Study Report

- 5.167 A Phase 1 Desk Study Report has been prepared by Clancy, assessing the site's environmental, geological, hydrological, hydrogeological, mining and subsidence conditions. The report develops a Conceptual Site Model to identify potential risks and inform any recommendations for further investigation or remediation, where necessary.

- 5.168 According to the report, the site has not been subject to significant historic development and is considered to present a low overall contamination risk. The principal potential source of contamination identified relates to possible areas of Made Ground associated with the construction of the existing pavilion building, car park and access road infrastructure. Owing to the site's existing topography, a cut-and-fill exercise is proposed, with excavated material being reused within the site wherever practicable, including the formation of the proposed landscaped bunding and wider earthworks strategy. The report therefore highlights the importance of confirming the nature and suitability of site-won materials through intrusive site investigation and geotechnical testing.
- 5.169 Due to the distances from site and the gas generation potential of sources identified, the only potential source of ground gases considered capable of posing a risk to the proposed development would be the unlikely presence of significant areas of Made Ground. The report notes that any Made Ground encountered would also be unsuitable as a foundation-bearing stratum and would require further investigation and appropriate engineering design.
- 5.170 The site is also underlain by Devensian Till (a Secondary Undifferentiated Aquifer), which, given the site setting, is not considered to represent a significant environmental receptor but may represent a suitably competent material to support traditional foundations, if present at shallow depth.
- 5.171 The report also considers potential unexploded ordnance (UXO) risks. Whilst the site is assessed as presenting a low UXO risk overall, the desk study recommends that the risk is reviewed as part of any subsequent intrusive investigation and earthworks planning given the scale of the proposed groundworks.
- 5.172 Potential human health receptors include future site users, construction workers and maintenance personnel, whilst the proposed buildings, infrastructure and landscaped areas are also identified as potential environmental and built environment receptors. Whittle Brook, approximately 100 metres to the south of the site, represents the nearest significant surface water receptor.
- 5.173 The report recommends that the desk study findings are verified through an intrusive ground investigation programme to confirm ground conditions, assess any contamination risks, determine the suitability of materials for re-use within the proposed earthworks and support detailed foundation and drainage design. Full details are contained within the Phase 1 Desk Study Report prepared by Clancy.
- 5.174 The findings of the desk study will be verified through a Phase 2 intrusive ground investigation, which will inform the detailed design of foundations, drainage and earthworks, including the proposed cut-and-fill exercise and reuse of suitable excavated material within the landscape bunding strategy.
- 5.175 Subject to the implementation of the recommendations contained within the report and any subsequent intrusive investigation works, the proposals are considered to accord with Places for Everyone Policy JP-S1, Core Strategy Policies EN17 and EN18, and Section 15 of the NPPF.

Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage

- 5.176 A combined Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy has been prepared by MAB Consultancy.

5.177 While there are a number of watercourses flowing around the site, including Langley Brook and Whittle Brook, the assessment confirms that the site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at low risk of flooding from rivers and the sea. Localised areas of surface water flood risk have been identified near the existing access drive, however these are addressed through the proposed drainage and SuDS strategy.

5.178 The Flood Risk Assessment within said Report concludes that the flood risk for the proposed development can be summarised as follows:

Flood Risk Type	Risk
Tidal/Fluvial (Rivers and Sea)	Low risk
Pluvial (Surface Water)	Low risk for majority of site Medium/high risk near driveway
Reservoir	Low risk - not within an area at risk of reservoir flooding
Public Sewers	Low risk - no surface or foul water sewers according to United Utilities record
Groundwater	Low risk

Table 5: Summary of Flood Risk

5.179 It is proposed that two connections will be made into the existing surface water drain from the site, which will be split into the Rochdale AFC facility and the Rochdale Borough Council facility.

5.180 The site will discharge surface water to Langley Brook via the existing drainage network. The strategy proposes two separate connections into the existing surface water drain, serving the Rochdale AFC training facility and the Rochdale Borough Council community facility respectively. Discharge rates from each drainage catchment will be restricted to the Q1 greenfield run-off rate for the 1 in 100-year storm event, including an allowance for climate change, providing a significant reduction in peak run-off compared with existing conditions.

5.181 The drainage strategy has been developed in accordance with the SuDS hierarchy. Infiltration has been discounted due to ground conditions and the presence of clayey soils, with the preferred solution comprising permeable paving, attenuation basins, flow control devices and associated drainage infrastructure. The attenuation basins have been designed to accommodate all rainfall events up to and including the 1 in 100-year storm event plus climate change allowance, whilst also contributing to the wider landscape, ecological and amenity objectives of the development. The improved drainage infrastructure will support the long-term performance and resilience of the proposed football pitches and community sporting facilities by facilitating effective management of surface water across the Site.

5.182 Foul drainage will utilise the existing foul drainage infrastructure where feasible, subject to agreement with United Utilities and confirmation of capacity. The proposed strategy includes provision for a pumping station, with a private treatment solution identified as a fallback option should connection to the existing system not be achievable. The development has been designed to ensure that foul and surface water systems remain separate in accordance with best practice drainage principles.

5.183 A maintenance plan has been appended to the assessment to ensure responsibility of the site owner to enact

the maintenance of the surface water system.

- 5.184 Overall, the proposals will have a positive impact on flood risk both within the Site and the wider area. The introduction of Sustainable Drainage Systems, attenuation storage and controlled discharge rates will reduce peak run-off from the Site, improve the management of existing surface water issues and ensure that the development does not increase flood risk elsewhere. The FRA concludes that the development will remain at low risk from all sources of flooding following implementation of the proposed drainage strategy.
- 5.185 Full details can be found in the FRA and Drainage Strategy Stage 3 Report, prepared by OBi Sports / MAB Consultancy.
- 5.186 The proposals are therefore in line with: PfE Policy JP-S4; CS Policies G1, G8, S2, S4; and Section 14 of the NPPF.

Broadband Connectivity Statement

- 5.187 A Broadband Connectivity Assessment has been prepared by GTech Surveys to assess the potential for broadband connectivity to the proposal.
- 5.188 The assessment concludes that the application site area is already likely to have excellent download speeds (expected to be at least 100+ megabits per second). Only BT Openreach has existing fibre infrastructure immediately adjacent to and into the site. Consequently, only BT Openreach can enable a full fibre connection for the proposed development due to the presence of fibre in the study area.
- 5.189 It is recommended that the applicant engages with a broadband infrastructure provider in order to establish the most optimal data infrastructure solution for the proposed development. It is considered that BT Openreach offers the most optimal connection, who can be contacted via their website.
- 5.190 Full fibre connections represent the most future-proof form of infrastructure. New development should look to increase the spread of full fibre connections, which have the potential to boost Bowlee's economy; help businesses grow and be more productive; and provide more symmetrical upload / download speeds for residents and businesses. Full fibre connections also offer greater reliability and lower energy / maintenance costs.
- 5.191 It is recommended that the applicant ensures that the proposed development is complete with high-speed-ready infrastructure, using this digital connectivity assessment for reference.
- 5.192 The proposals are therefore in line with PfE Policy JP-C2 and Section 10 of the NPPF.

Conclusion

- 5.193 The proposed Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub represents a substantial investment in an established sporting, recreational and community destination. The development does not introduce an unrelated use onto the Site, nor does it undermine its primary function as a destination for sport, recreation and community activity. Instead, it seeks to secure the long-term future of Bowlee through the delivery of enhanced football and cricket provision, community sports facilities, health and wellbeing infrastructure,

improved accessibility, biodiversity enhancements, sustainable drainage infrastructure and significant investment in supporting facilities.

- 5.194 The proposals retain and strengthen the sporting, recreational and community role of the Site whilst responding positively to identified deficiencies in existing provision, including poor drainage, variable pitch quality, ageing infrastructure and unmet demand for year-round sporting facilities. The development delivers significant benefits through improved sporting capacity, enhanced community facilities, increased participation opportunities, improved accessibility, strengthened green infrastructure, biodiversity enhancements and substantial health and wellbeing benefits for local communities and the wider Borough.
- 5.195 The supporting technical assessments demonstrate that the development can be accommodated without giving rise to unacceptable impacts in relation to residential amenity, highways and parking, landscape character, ecology, arboriculture, drainage, flood risk, noise, lighting, air quality or ground conditions. Where mitigation measures are required, these have been identified and incorporated into the design and operational strategy of the development.
- 5.196 Taken as a whole, the proposals accord with the overarching objectives of the Development Plan by supporting healthy communities, enhancing sports and recreation facilities, strengthening green infrastructure, improving wellbeing outcomes, supporting sustainable movement, protecting environmental assets and securing the long-term recreational and community value of Bowlee Community Park. The application therefore demonstrates strong compliance with the Development Plan when read as a whole and should be supported accordingly.



6

Planning Balance

6. Planning Balance

6.1 The proposal has been considered to be in compliance with the Development Plan and any Material Considerations. To summarise this position, the below sets out the scheme against the three dimensions of sustainable development as defined by paragraph 8 of the Framework.

Economic Benefits



The proposal represents significant investment in an established community asset, bringing Rochdale AFC's training and operational facilities into the Borough alongside enhanced sporting, recreation and wellbeing infrastructure.

- The development will establish Rochdale AFC's training and operational base within Rochdale Borough, accommodating first team, academy and community football activities within a permanent facility and strengthening the Club's presence and investment within the Borough.
- During the construction phase, the proposed development would support a number of direct and indirect jobs within the construction industry and associated supply chains.
- The operation and management of the Football and Community Wellbeing Hub will support employment opportunities associated with the management, maintenance, operation and programming of the sporting, community and wellbeing facilities.

Social Benefits



The proposal will create a single integrated destination for sport, recreation, health, wellbeing and community activity, broadening the range of facilities available to local residents.

- Provision of three Artificial Grass Pitches, enhanced grass football provision and replacement cricket practice facilities, increasing the quality, capacity and year-round usability of the Site.
- Support for identified growth in youth football, women and girls' football, disability football and wider community participation programmes.
- Improved opportunities for participation in sport, physical activity, recreation and health and wellbeing programmes through enhanced sporting and community infrastructure.
- Delivery of a Football and Community Wellbeing Hub incorporating a 40-station gym, community meeting facilities and café space, broadening the range of recreation, health and wellbeing facilities available within Bowlee Community Park.

Environmental Benefits



The proposal is situated within a sustainable location with good access to public transport modes and not impacting upon any statutory wildlife sites.

- Retention and enhancement of the Site's green infrastructure through new tree planting, native hedgerows, species-rich grassland, ecological planting and habitat creation measures.
- The proposal is located within an accessible location and incorporates secure cycle parking and connections to existing walking, wheeling and cycling routes, supporting sustainable travel choices and access by a range of transport modes.
- Delivery of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain through a combination of on-site habitat enhancements and off-site habitat unit provision.
- Provision of sustainable drainage infrastructure, including attenuation basins and permeable paving, helping to better manage surface water and improve the site's resilience to flooding.

- 6.2 Overall, the proposed development would deliver substantial economic, social and environmental benefits. The scheme would secure significant investment in Bowlee Community Park, establish Rochdale AFC's training and operational facilities within Rochdale Borough, enhance sporting and community infrastructure, improve opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity, strengthen green infrastructure and biodiversity, and deliver a more accessible and resilient sporting and wellbeing destination for Middleton and the wider Borough.
- 6.3 The application is supported by a comprehensive suite of technical assessments which demonstrate that the development can be accommodated without giving rise to unacceptable adverse impacts and that appropriate mitigation measures have been identified where required. When assessed against the Development Plan as a whole, the significant sporting, community, health, wellbeing and environmental benefits arising from the proposals substantially outweigh any limited adverse effects. The development therefore represents sustainable development, accords with the Development Plan when read as a whole and should be approved accordingly.
- 6.4 It is therefore considered that the proposals accord with the Development Plan and consequently the proposals should be approved without delay in accordance with paragraph 11(c) of the NPPF and the RBC Development Plan.