

Rochdale BC

FAO: Anna Hayes

By email only

18th Aug 2026

Planning Application Reference: PL/2026/0679

Site: Land Off Heywood Old Road, Middleton, OL10 2HZ

Proposal: Construction of an SEN school, with associated access, parking, landscaping, drainage, land regrading and associated works.

Sport England Reference: PA/26/NW/RO/74691

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Summary:

Statutory Response:

Sport England considers that the proposal, subject to condition, meets Exception 3 of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and the requirements of the NPPF.

Non-Statutory Response:

MUGA courts markings will be required to meet Sport England standards, this can be achieved by planning condition.

Recommended Condition Summary:

1. CEMP details
2. MUGA to meet Sport England surfacing standards

An assessment of the proposal and full condition wording is set out below.

Sport England –Statutory Role and Policy

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

Sport England has considered this application submission in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (in particular Para. HC7), and against its own playing fields policy, which states:

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

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

unless, in the judgement of Sport England, the development as a whole meets with one or more of five specific exceptions.' (Annex to this response).

Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and Guidance document can be viewed via the below link:

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

The Proposal and Impact on the Playing Field

The proposal is for the development of a 64 pupil (max) SEND facility. The proposal, the application site, is on an area of land which does not appear to have been previously marked out for pitch sports. The proposal includes an access road which wraps around the north and northwestern section of the adjacent playing field used by Edgar Wood Academy and has a proposed car park directly adjacent to the playing field. In view of the latter elements, the proposal is considered to impact existing playing field land associated with the adjacent school.

The existing school has an approved pitch sports layout on its natural turf playing field which includes a full size 11v11 football pitch; a 400m athletics track; rounders pitch; and other athletic field facilities. When considering the proposal, the proposal's impact on these facilities will be assessed. The submitted drawing ED0065-22 Rev J, indicates the area of playing field which will be lost as the '*Area of land gifted from Edgar Wood to facilitate access road.*'

The drawing shows how the pitch and sport facility markings on Edgar Wood are to be provided and will comply with the previously approved layout for the secondary school.

Google Extract 2023 showing the application site to the east of the adjacent playing field.



Assessment against Sport England Policy

Sport England has assessed the submission in view of its policy and advised the following:-

E1: Does not meet this exception the proposal may affect a playing field at an existing high school which Sport England expects to be supported by natural turf sports facility provision. There is no evidence that the existing playing field provision and pitches at the adjacent site are no longer needed.

E2: Does not apply as the proposal is for an educational use.

E3: Has the potential to apply if no pitch areas are impacted.

E4: Applies if the proposal is considered to be more than de-minimis in terms of playing field loss and impact.

E5: Does not apply. The proposal is for an educational facility.

The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph HC7 states that development proposals should not result in the loss of existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, other formal and informal play space and allotments, unless:

- a. An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b. The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, in a location which offers comparable or improved accessibility for the community it serves; or
- c. The development is for public service infrastructure, and the resulting loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and/or quality; or
- d. The development is for alternative open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

Sport England's Position

The proposal for the new SEND facility will result in a small loss of playing field to the northern edge of the site. This is considered as a de-minimis loss as it will not result in the inability of the adjacent secondary school to mark out pitches in accordance with the original planning approval for Edgar Wood as indicated in the original submitted Agronomy Report May 2021:

Extract from Agronomy Report by PSD May 2021 for Edgar Wood development:

2. It is understood that the playing field is to accommodate:
 - a. 1 Nr. U17 / U18 100 m x 64 m 11v11 football pitch with 3 m safety margin.
 - b. 1 Nr. U17 / U18 100 m x 70 m rugby pitch with 10 m in-goals and 5 m safety margin.
 - c. 2 Nr. U7 / U8 37 m x 27 m 5v5 football pitches.
 - d. 1 Nr. 6-lane 400 m running track.
 - e. 1 Nr. 8-lane 60 m sprint track.



Figure 1. Proposed layout and location of test pits (not to scale).
(Drawing courtesy of Ares landscape Architects Limited)

It is noted that there is no intended formal provision for cricket at the existing school and as such, there is minimal risk of ball strike in relation to the car park, although this may arise through the use of the football pitch. In which case the local planning authority should consider this under paragraph P4 of the NPPF.

On this basis Sport England is satisfied the Exception 3 of our Playing Fields Policy and Guidance is met, subject to CEMP information, in that the proposed development affects only land incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and does not:

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

Sport England – Non-Statutory Role and Policy

The Government, within their Planning Practice Guidance (Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities Section) advises Local Planning Authorities to consult Sport England on a wide range of applications: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space#open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities>

Sport England assesses this impact on the sports hall and internal sports facilities in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and against its own planning objectives, which are Protect – To protect the right opportunities in the right places; Enhance – To enhance opportunities through better use of existing provision; Provide – To provide new opportunities to meet the needs of current and future generations. Further information on the objectives and Sport England's wider planning guidance can be found on its website: <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport>

The proposal includes an area which includes a MUGA which is marked out for sports including basketball and netball. The provision is welcomed and whilst the markings appear to meet Sport England standards, a compliance condition is recommended.

It would appear that the nature trail utilises a significant grassed area which is of a size that could be made available for wider sporting use, such as athletics, rounders and a larger football pitch. Sport England supports the opportunity it provides in encouraging activity in pupils but sees significant scope around other areas of the landscaped area that could be used for the nature trail provision to allow further potential for pitch sport use. However we are aware that the particular needs for SEND provision and whilst the provision for sport is limited, the provision of the MUGA to Sport England specification will provide a suitable, if limited, sport offer.

Sport England would encourage the school to take the opportunity to open its facilities for community use and guidance on this can be found here: <https://www.sportengland.org/funding-and-campaigns/use-our-school>

<https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/community-use-agreements>

Sport England promoted the use of Active Design to encourage activity in everyday lives and further advice to inform the final design of the proposal can be found here:

<https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design>

Conclusion

Statutory

Given the above assessment, Sport England raise **no objection, subject to condition**, as it has been demonstrated that the development accords with Exception 3 – of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and with Paragraph HC7 of the NPPF.

Non-Statutory

Given the above assessment, Sport England raise **no objection, subject to condition**, as it has been broadly demonstrated that the development accords with Sport England's objective to 'Provide' and Section 8 of the NPPF.

The absence of an objection is subject to the following conditions being imposed should the local planning authority (LPA) resolve to approve the application. If the LPA is minded to approve the application without imposing the recommended conditions, then Sport England objects to the application as it is not considered to accord with paragraph 104 of the NPPF.

If you wish to amend the wording of the conditions or use another mechanism in lieu of the conditions, please contact us to discuss. Sport England does not object to amendments to conditions, provided they achieve the same outcome and we are involved in any amendments.

Should the local planning authority be minded to approve this application without the above conditions, then given Sport England's subsequent objection the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2024 requires the application to be referred to the Secretary of State via the National Planning Casework Unit.

Recommended Conditions:

1. *No development shall commence until full details of:*

(a) the works/contractors' compound (including any buildings, moveable structures, works, plant, machinery, access and provision for the storage of vehicles, equipment and/or materials); and

(b) a scheme for the removal of the works/contractors' compound and the restoration of the land on which it is situated

are submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority after consultation with Sport England. The works/contractors' compound shall not be provided and used on the site other than in accordance with the approved details and shall be removed and the land on which it is situated restored in accordance with the approved details before occupation of the development hereby approved.

*Reason: To protect [playing fields/sports facilities] from damage, loss or availability of use and to accord with Development Plan Policy **.*

2. *The MUGA hereby permitted shall not be constructed other than substantially in accordance with Sport England/National Governing Body Technical Design Guidance Notes <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/outdoor-surfaces>*

*Reason: To ensure the development is fit for purpose and sustainable and to accord with Development Plan Policy ***

If this application is to be presented to a Planning Committee, we would like to be notified in advance of the publication of any committee agenda(s), report(s) and committee date(s). Please notify Sport England of the outcome of the planning application.

The above comments reflect Sport England's current understanding of the proposal based on the information so far provided. Should the proposal or accompanying information be updated, this may lead to a change in Sport England's position.

Any further information should be submitted to planning.north@sportengland.org

Yours sincerely

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Annex

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy

Exception 1

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

Exception 2

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

Exception 3

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

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

Exception 4

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

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

Exception 5

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

The full 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at:

www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy