

Hinckley & Bedworth BC
FAO: Joe Fleetwood
By email only

12 May 2026

**Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England)
Order 2015**

Application Reference: 26/00305/FUL

Site: Ratby Sports Club, Desford Lane, Ratby

Proposal: Erection of 2 Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP). A clubhouse, three padel courts, 500 person covered stand, tractor store, gated and turnstile access, steps and platform lift up to the site and parking facilities

Sport England Reference: PA/25/EM/HIN/73706

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Sport England – statutory consultee role and policy

We understand that you have consulted us as a statutory consultee in line with the above Order. We have considered the application in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular paragraph 104, and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy, which is presented within our 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document': www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy

The proposal and impact on playing field

The proposal would involve the construction of:

- 2 x 3G sports lit Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP). The larger stadia pitch would accommodate a football pitch area of 100m x 64m with 3m run-offs (106m x 70m) (11v11 format). The smaller AGP would accommodate a football pitch area of 55m x 37m with 3m run-offs (61m x 43m) (7v7 format).
- A single storey football clubhouse providing space for two team changing rooms, two officials changing rooms, spectator toilets including disabled wc, kitchen, meeting room, medical room, club room and external storage room.
- A 500-person covered stand overlooking the new 11v11 AGP to include 250 seats.
- Gated and turnstile access to the AGPs.
- Three covered sports lit padel courts.
- New steps and platform lift between the proposed car parking area and the AGPs.
- A new 96-space car park, disabled parking, coach parking and turning, cycle parking and improved access from Desford Lane.

Biodiversity enhancements would be delivered on the area of land to the east as shown on the Site Location Plan (Drw No: 9431_03_10 Rev PL1). The finished floor levels on the area of land proposed for the 3G pitches would be raised as shown on the General Arrangement Plan Sheet No. 001.

Sport England has not been involved in pre-application discussions on this proposal. Prior to preparing this planning consultation response Sport England has sought the views of the Football Foundation (FF), the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on the planning application as they act as Sport England's technical advisors in relation to their sport and its facilities. Comments received from the FF, LTA and ECB are included in the response below.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

The application relates to the construction of an outdoor sports facility which would lead to the loss of an area of playing field at the above site and could prejudice the use of playing pitches at the site. The proposal therefore needs to be considered against paragraph 104 (c) of the NPPF (2024) and exception 5 of Sport England's playing fields policy. Exception 5 states that:

'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.'

As such, an assessment of the benefits of the new sports facility is required. Whilst Sport England does not wish to discourage new sports facilities, where they result in the loss of grass playing field, it is essential that there are sufficient benefits to the development of sport to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field and to ensure that any sport facility does not have a negative impact on other sport facilities.

In seeking to balance the potential loss of playing field against the provision of a new outdoor sports facility, Sport England will consider amongst other matters, the following factors:

- The need for the facility – has this been identified in a local sport and recreation strategy, a governing body facility strategy or similar document?
- Technical suitability – does the proposed facility meet the specifications set out in Sport England's Guidance Notes or a relevant National Governing Body of Sport's Guidance Notes?
- Community availability – will the facility be available to the community and if so, will the terms of availability be clearly set out in a community use agreement?
- Local level of pitch provision – does the local area have a shortfall of playing pitches that would be exacerbated by the current proposal?
- Can replacement playing field be provided on the site and/or existing outdoor sports facilities enhanced to compensate for the loss of the playing field?

Need for the Facility

Hinckley and Bosworth BC has a robust and up-to-date evidence base for playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities to inform decision making as required by Paragraph 103 of the NPPF (2024). The Council adopted its Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) in 2025. The PPS indicates that there is a shortfall of four 11v11 3G pitches in the Borough. The PPS goes further to identify specific shortfalls of one 11v11 3G FTPs in the North East & Leicester analysis area (Ratby/Groby) of Hinckley and Bosworth, which the application site is located within. The PPS also identified potential sites which could be suitable for the development of an AGP to reduce the shortfall and satisfy local demand from community football clubs. Ratby Sports Club was included as a potential site.

The FF has provided information confirming that Anstey Nomads have teams which play at Ratby Sports Club. The PPS includes data that 14 teams play at the site. Whilst there is a strategic need for one 11 v 11 AGP in the area, the FF has commented that there is not a clear strategic justification for 2 AGPs on the site. Further evidence is required to justify the need for the 7 v 7 AGP proposed.

The FF has also raised concerns that a strategic need for a stadia AGP has not been justified. An existing stadia pitch is located less than 1 mile from the site at Kirby Muxloe Sports Club. This is a step 5 compliant 3G stadia. The application submission lacks details on the need for an additional stadia pitch in the area as the football clubs proposed to use the site appear to meet step 5 compliance requirements elsewhere. Further evidence is required to justify the need for a stadia AGP at the site.

The application submission also lacks information on the sports related benefits of the proposal for the community, including how the proposal would increase the number of people playing in the community and how the AGPs would support a variety of playing formats. There is no information on any community engagement findings for the project.

Based on the above assessment it is considered that a strategic need for a stadia 11v11 AGP and a 7v7 AGP for use as a community sports facility for football has not been sufficiently justified.

The proposal would also involve the construction of three covered padel courts. The Design and Access Statement includes details on the demand for padel courts in the area. The LTA has provided information on a demand analysis conducted for Hinckley and Bosworth local authority. The data suggests that a minimum of 8 padel courts are required to meet demand and that only 3 padel courts are currently available in the borough. These 3 padel courts are located over 10 miles away from the application site. The need for additional padel courts in this area is therefore confirmed.

Technical Suitability

The FF has confirmed that the fencing and drainage details submitted with the application for the AGPs appear to comply with the Football Foundation's Framework. However, the following details are required to further assess technical compliance of the AGPs: surface pile length, infill type and shock pad construction and infill retention boards.

The FF recommend that cross-section drawings (drawn to scale) should be provided showing the materials, subbase, shockpad, infill type and surface pile of the AGPs. The FF would also want to see details of infill grates and boot brushes included. Confirmation should also be provided that the AGPs would be registered on the FA Pitch Register for match play.

The LUX levels and LED product specifications proposed would meet the FF requirements. However, plans which include a lighting assessment of the pitches should be submitted.

The changing rooms proposed meet the FF's technical guidance regarding cubicle showers, WCs (changing rooms and non-player), officials' changing rooms and safeguarding measures. Confirmation is required that the players changing rooms have a floor area of at least 18m² which excludes toilets, showers and lobby areas.

Based on the above, it has not been adequately demonstrated that the AGPs would meet technical specifications.

With regards to the padel courts, the LTA has raised concerns about the proposed design of the courts. The height of the padel building is some 7.685m over the net line whereas the recommended height of the building over the centre of the net is 8 metres. The width between the courts and the canopy columns should be 1.2 metres to allow a sports wheelchair to access the courts. The lighting information provided is not court specific and limited in detail. The applicant should provide a datapack and lighting designs for each court.

The design of the padel courts should be compliant with the SAPCA Code of Practice for Padel. Based on the concerns raised by the LTA, it has not been demonstrated that the padel court design would meet technical specifications.

Community Availability

The application submission lacks details of community availability of the proposed scheme including confirmation that the applicant would be prepared to enter into a Community Use Agreement (CUA) to make the facilities available to the wider community. A CUA is required to ensure that the proposed AGPs and padel courts are used by the community in line with the requirements in the Council's PPS.

The proposed sports facility would be located in close proximity to an approved housing scheme to the south of the planning application site as mentioned in the Design and Access Statement. The FF recognise that landscaping has been planned along the site boundary with the proposed housing and that a lighting layout has been prepared by Halliday Lighting to ensure that floodlighting would not significantly impact on the amenity of future residents. The planning application form states that the sports facilities would be used between 0800 to 2200 Mondays to Saturdays and 0800 to 2000 on Sundays. However, the application documentation lacks the submission of a noise assessment

Sport England has produced technical guidance on AGP Acoustics which should be used when undertaking a Noise Assessment which takes into account the late-night use of the stadia pitch, the 7v7 AGP and the padel courts and their potential impact on the amenity of future residents:

<https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/agp-acoustics-planning-implications.pdf?VersionId=eORPPBrK6irJ2FqvHWitOASeYu6U egt>

An indicative programme of use for the stadia AGP, the 7v7 AGP and the padel courts should then be provided showing how the sports facilities would be used by the community to ensure that sufficient community use could be provided.

Based on the above this criterion has not been met.

Local Level of Pitch Provision

The proposed AGPs, padel courts, car park, club house and stands would be built on playing field. The Council's PPS includes data on the football pitches marked out on the site being: 1 x youth 11v11; 1 x youth 9v9; 5 x mini 7v7 and 3 x mini 5v5.

The ECB confirm that there should be no impact on the use of the cricket pitches and existing pavilion at the site from the proposed development.

The proposed AGPs, padel courts, car parking and club house would result in the loss of grass football pitches. The FF has raised concerns that the site of the proposed car park has previously (as recently as 2018) been marked out as a mini-soccer u9/u10 (7v7) grass pitch. 2025 aerial images show 4 youth grass pitches (2 x 9v9 and 2 x 7v7) on the site with 2023 markings showing the site had 9v9 and 11v11 grass pitches. The PPS does show deficiencies in match sessions for youth 11 v 11 and 9 v 9 formats in the analysis area. The proposal for a stadium compliant pitch would result in the loss of match play for these smaller size formats as overmarking is not possible on this type of pitch. The proposed 7v7 AGP would be unable to host these alternative-size games.

The PPS includes data that the grass pitches at the site are poor quality. The proposal would result in the loss of flexibility to mark out grass pitches for match

play at the site. The FF raise concerns that the proposal would represent a loss for football which would not be compensated for by the proposal to build a stadia AGP and a small-sided AGP at the site.

Based on the above, it is Sport England's and the FF's opinion that the applicant has not demonstrated that the remaining playing field land would be sufficient in size to satisfactorily accommodate the playing pitches required. A Proposed Grass Pitch Layout plan should be submitted showing how grass pitches could be marked out on the remaining playing field. Information by way of an agronomy report should also be provided showing how the quality of the remaining playing field would be improved to increase its playing capacity. This factor has therefore not been met.

Replacement Playing Field

Replacement playing field would not be provided.

Summary

Based on the evidence above, it is considered that the proposal would fail to meet exception 5 of Sport England's playing fields policy and Paragraph 104 c) of the NPPF (2024) in that the benefits to sport of this outdoor sports facility would not outweigh the loss of playing field.

Conclusion

Given the above assessment, Sport England's current position is to raise an **objection** to this application, which is not considered to accord with any of the exceptions in Sport England's playing fields policy or in Paragraph 104 of the NPPF. The proposal would lead to the loss of playing field in an area where there are deficiencies in playing pitches as recorded in the Council's PPS (2025).

Sport England is committed to working with the applicant to secure sports facilities which meet the needs of the community and are designed in accordance with technical guidance. Further information is suggested in the text above. In providing any further information, Sport England would ask that the applicant submits this to the Local Planning Authority and not to Sport England directly. That way it forms part of the application submission and its associated audit trail. The Local Planning Authority can then consult Sport England on receipt of this information. We will respond within 21 days of re-consultation.

Please contact us if you wish to discuss the above further.

Yours sincerely,

Sharron Wilkinson, MRPTI
Planning Manager