

Ribble Valley Borough Council

FAO: Lucy Walker

By email only

1st July 2026

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

Application Reference: 3/2026/0423

Site: Langho Sports and Social Club, Northcote Road, Langho, BB6 8BE

Proposal: Proposed creation of a synthetic turf pitch with fencing, floodlighting, access path, changing block, and the extension and formalisation of the existing car park and ancillary equipment

Sport England Reference: PA/26/NW/RV/74220

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

Summary:

Statutory consultee role

Sport England raises **no objection**, as it is considered to accord with exceptions 2 and 5 of our Playing Fields Policy and paragraph 104 of the NPPF, subject to the inclusion of the planning conditions specified within this letter in the planning permission.

Sport England – Statutory consultee role and policy

We understand that you have consulted us as a statutory consultee in line with the above Order. Therefore, 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

Sport England's policy is to oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or prejudice the use of all or any part of a playing field, or land which has been used as a playing field land 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. A summary of the exceptions is provided in the annex to this response.

The Proposal and its Impact on the playing field

The Applicant's seeking planning permission to create a new external 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) at Langho Sports and Social Club. Associated works are proposed including fencing, floodlighting, ancillary equipment, changing block and extension of the existing car park. The 3G AGP would be on an existing playing field, resulting in the displacement of a natural turf football pitch.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

As this proposal is for an outdoor facility for sport, specifically an 3G AGP, which would result in the loss of playing field, in line with exception 5 of our Playing Fields Policy, due consideration needs to be given as to whether 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.

An identified local or strategic need

The Football Foundation (FF) advise that,

'Ribble Valley Borough Council has an up-to-date Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS, 2024) and Local Football Facilities Plan (LFFP, April 2025), both of which identify a clear shortfall in accessible 3G FTP provision across the borough. The PPS identifies 232 affiliated teams (2023/24 season), equating to a requirement for six full-size 11v11 3G FTPs.

There are currently three full-size 3G FTPs and three small-sided 3G FTPs within the borough. However, access to these facilities is constrained, with two of the full-size pitches unavailable for community use and one small-sided pitch (Bowland High School) lacking floodlighting, limiting midweek and peak-time access. As a result, effective community access to 3G provision is significantly restricted. Of the full-size provision, the 3G at Edisford Sports Complex is the only pitch available for community football and is currently operating at capacity.

The PPS identifies a borough-wide shortfall of 5.25 full-size 11v11 3G FTPs, with geographic deficits across Clitheroe (1.0), Longridge (0.5), Northern Parishes (0.75), Southern Parishes (2.75), and Whalley (0.25). Langho is identified as a priority location to address this need and contribute towards reducing the wider shortfall.'

The proposed development would therefore assist in meeting an evidenced need.

Fully secures sport-related benefits for the local community

The provision of the 3G AGP could be used continuously throughout the year and intensively due to its artificial grass surface and floodlighting. The 3G AGP will also offer a variety of football pitches and training areas within the same enclosed playing space to support development plans into grassroots football. Additionally, the FF advise that consultation with clubs highlights limited access to 3G provision remains a key constraint to growth, particularly for Women & Girls and disability football, with facility access identified as the primary barrier to participation. This development would benefit the local community as it would assist in meeting a current need continuously throughout the year.

Complies with relevant Sport England and national governing bodies of sport design guidance

In terms of the design of the AGP, the applicant has not clarified the length of the synthetic turf pile. Nevertheless, they set out that the intention is for the pitch to be to meet FIFA quality performance requirements. Additionally, the FF advised that *'everything is satisfactory'*, and *'from a technical perspective, FF requested that the FA 3G Pitch Register... are secured by condition to ensure continuity of match play.'* A condition requiring the submission and approval by the local planning authority (in consultation with Sport England) of certification that the artificial grass pitch has met the FIFA Quality Standard accreditation or equivalent International Artificial Turf Standard (IATS) requirements of the artificial grass pitch is considered reasonable. This is necessary because AGPs can only be sanctioned for FA affiliated community football match use where the pitch has been tested to meet these requirements. Further details of the FIFA standard are on FIFA's website at <http://quality.fifa.com/en/Football-Turf/Install-Football-Turf/Certification/>.

The facility is intended to be designed and maintained to meet these technical standards, but this cannot be confirmed in practice unless appropriate testing takes place which certifies this. As a pitch can only be tested for certification when it is completed it would not be possible to request the information to be provided at planning application or pre-commencement stages. Following meeting the tests, the facility will need to be registered on the FA's Register of Football Turf Pitches <http://3g.thefa.me.uk/> to enable it to be sanctioned for FA affiliated community football match use. It is requested that a condition is enclosed based on condition 9b of our model conditions schedule:

The FF also requested that a '*Community Use Agreement are secured by condition to ensure continuity of match play.*' As the site is a community facility and is not subject to restricted use, such as a school site, Sport England would not seek a community use agreement. Reason being is such agreements are normally required to secure community access to a facility. In this case, the site is not owned by a school or professional football club.

Summary of the Proposal Against Exception 5

To summarise, whilst the proposal would result in the displacement of a football pitch, it would deliver a floodlit AGP, which would provide a modern all weather surface that would be capable of intensive use throughout the year for matches, training and coaching. The AGP would be capable of accommodating a range of different sized football pitches and would be suitable for both matches and training. The design and layout of the AGP would accord with the Football Association's design guidance which will help ensure that a fit for purpose facility that is suitable for meeting community needs will be implemented in practice. In turn, the proposal would offer an opportunity for other clubs/teams to train and/or play at the facility. Sport England therefore considers that the delivery of an AGP on this site, presents clear benefits outweighing the detriment caused by the displacement of a grass playing pitch. The AGP would therefore meet exception 5 of our Playing Fields Policy.

Ancillary Provision Including Car Park Extension

A changing block and car park extension are proposed on the existing playing pitch. These are ancillary facilities supporting the principal use of the site as a playing field and would not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches or otherwise adversely affect their use, due to their location and size. For these reasons they are considered to meet exception 2 of our Playing Fields Policy.

Sport England's Position

To conclude on our statutory position, Sport England raises **no objection**, subject to the planning condition outlined below being attached to any permissions, because the proposal is considered to accord with exceptions 2 and 5 of our Playing Fields Policy and paragraph 104 of the NPPF.

Certification of the Artificial Grass Pitch

'Use of the development shall not commence until:

(a) certification that the Artificial Grass Pitch hereby permitted has met FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf – FIFA Quality or equivalent International Artificial Turf Standard (IMS) and

(b) confirmation that the facility has been registered on the Football Association's Register of Football Turf Pitches have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the development is fit for purpose and sustainable, provides sporting benefits and to accord with Development Plan Policy.'

If the LPA is minded to approve the application without imposing the above condition then Sport England objects to the application.

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

If the Council decides not to attach the above conditions, Sport England would wish to be advised before the application is determined so that our position on the planning application can be reviewed.

Should the local planning authority be minded to approve this application without the above conditions, then given Sport England's subsequent objection and in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021, the application should be referred to the Secretary of State via the National Planning Casework Unit.

COMMENTS MADE AS A NON-STATUTORY CONSULTEE

As a non-statutory consultee, without prejudice to our position as a statutory consultee set out above, Sport England would wish to make advisory comments on the following matters:

Principle of the Development

Sport England assesses this type of application in line with its planning objectives and with the NPPF. Sport England's planning objectives are to PROTECT existing facilities, ENHANCE the quality, accessibility and management of existing facilities, and to PROVIDE new facilities to meet demand. Sport England's Planning for Sport guidance can be found via the following link –

<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-for-sport-guidance/> .

Principles 6 and 7 of the guidance relate to the 'Enhance' objective and in summary support improvements to the existing sport provision where they are needed (principle 6) and encourage/secure wider community use of existing and new sports provision. The proposed development would provide an enhanced sports facility that would offer potential to make a significant contribution towards meeting community sports facility needs in the area for the reasons set out above. The proposals are therefore considered to meet principles 6 and 7 of the guidance therefore Sport England would wish to confirm its **support** for the principle of the proposed development as a non-statutory consultee.

Changing Room

There is a direct line of sight into the officials' rooms and changing rooms, a privacy screen or dedicated lobby area should be included to mitigate safeguarding concerns privacy screen. If privacy screens can't be provided in the officials' changing rooms, a thumb-turn lock on the door would be required to protect privacy when officials are changing. Sport England advises this is addressed prior to determination.

Sport England strongly recommends that the issues relating to the line of sight and the visitor changing room window are addressed to protect users' privacy and resolve the identified safeguarding concerns.

Hours of Use and Sports Lighting

The proposal for the AGP to include sports lighting is welcomed and considered essential as this will offer significant sports development benefits in terms of facilitating use by the community during peak periods of demand. Without suitable sports lighting, it would not be possible for the facility to meet the needs that it has been designed to address and the potential for securing revenue to support its long term maintenance would be prejudiced.

While Sport England would not require a planning condition to be imposed relating to the hours of use of the AGP or its sports lighting, it is acknowledged that the Council may wish to impose such a condition in order to address potential impact on residential amenity or the environment. If planning permission is granted, it is recommended that any condition that may be imposed by the Council relating to the hours of use of the lighting and the use of the AGP is not overly restrictive. In this regard, it is advised that peak community use of AGPs on similar sites usually extends until 22:00 on weekday evenings.

If the Council wishes to impose a planning condition restricting the hours of use of the AGP or its sports lighting, consideration should be given to using condition 14 from our model conditions schedule.

It should be noted that if the Council sought to remove the sports lighting or impose significant restrictions on the hours of use of the AGP or its lighting in the evenings this may affect our position on the planning application as the potential sport related benefits would be diminished plus it may affect the feasibility and sustainability of the project. If such an approach is to be taken it is requested that Sport England be advised before the planning application is determined to provide an opportunity to review our position on the planning application.

If the design of the lighting scheme is material to the assessment of the planning application, I would recommend that consideration be given to Sport England's 'Artificial Sports Lighting' guidance note (2012)

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

Noise

If noise generated from the use of the AGP is an issue in the determination of the planning application, Sport England has published a guidance note on the planning implications of AGP acoustics. This is intended to aid in developing a more consistent approach when assessing the noise associated with AGP use and to provide some rules of thumb when assessing noise impact. If applicable, it is recommended that this guidance is considered to inform any assessment of noise impact as it has been tailored to assist with the consideration of this issue.

This can be downloaded from our website at

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

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.

If you would like any further information or advice, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Howe

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Planning Manager

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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