North Hertfordshire District Council

By email only

Date: 7th October 2026

FAO Thomas Howe

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

Application Reference: 26/02271/S73
Site: Highfield School , Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3QA
Proposal: Section 73 Application : Removal of conditions 6 and 7 of planning permission 25/01830/FP granted 10.03.2026 for creation of a 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, storage container, and an access footpath (as amended by plans and information received 8th and 23rd December 2025 and 6th January 2026).
Sport England Reference: PA/26/E/NH/75218

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. Therefore, we have considered the application in light of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular policy HC7, and Sport England's Playing Fields Policy, which is presented within our 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document': www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy (summary of exceptions annexed to this letter).

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

The application involves the removal of conditions 6 and 7 imposed on planning permission 25/01830/FP. Both conditions were imposed in response to advice provided by Sport England on this application in our formal response dated 18th August 2025. I would make the following assessment of the proposals.

Condition 6: Artificial Grass Pitch Certification

Sport England requested that this condition be imposed on the basis that the original application proposed an artificial grass pitch (AGP) with a 3G surface

suitable for football. As AGPs with 3G surfaces need to meet the FIFA Quality standard to be sanctioned for competitive community football matches, the condition was requested to help ensure that the surface was designed to meet this standard in order to ensure that it could be used for competitive community football matches in practice. However, the applicant has now advised that the surface of the AGP will be a sand dressed surface designed for multi-sports use rather than principally football use. Sand dressed surfaces do not need to meet the FIFA Quality standard as they are unsuitable in principle for being used for community football matches.

It is accepted that the change of surface would negate the need for the condition to be imposed as such a condition would no longer be applicable. While the football related benefits of the proposal would be diminished by the change of surface, sand dressed surfaces are multi-sports surfaces that are more suitable for other sports such as hockey, tennis and netball but can still be used for football training and informal matches. It is not considered that the sport related benefits of the AGP would be reduced by the proposed change of surface on this occasion. I can therefore confirm that **no objection** is made to this condition being removed.

Condition 7: Community Use Agreement

Sport England requested that this condition be imposed on the expectation that there would be significant community use of the AGP outside of school hours as the original application initially proposed that the facility would include floodlighting and that community use hours that would extend until 20:00 in the evenings on Monday - Friday plus daytime use on both Saturdays and Sundays. Following amendments that were made after the original application was submitted, the floodlighting was removed and the hours of use were restricted by condition to 08:00 - 17:00 Monday -Friday and 09:00-13:00 on Saturdays with no use on Sundays. These restrictions are likely to limit community use to mainly Saturday mornings for most of the year due to the lack of daylight hours that the AGP can be used by the community outside of school hours.

While these restrictions would reduce the community use potential of the AGP, the benefits of the facility for Highfield School would still be significant and therefore the changes would not affect Sport England's overall position on the proposal i.e. the proposals would still be considered to meet Policy HC7(d) of the NPPF and exception 5 of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy. However, due to the much more limited scope for community use of the approved AGP, the need for a community use agreement to secure community access has been diminished. While a case can be made that a community use agreement should still be secured to formalise community access during the limited periods that the AGP

will be available, given that the community benefits would now be a secondary benefit of the AGP and Highfield School intend to make the facility available for community use anyway along with its existing facilities that already have established community access arrangements, it would be more difficult to make a case that the imposition of condition 7 was still necessary to make the development acceptable. On this occasion therefore, **no objection** would be made to the condition being removed.

Sport England's Position

Further to the above assessment, Sport England **does not wish to raise an objection** to this application as a statutory consultee.

Please notify Sport England of the outcome of the planning application.

If you would like any further information or advice, please contact the undersigned

Yours sincerely,

Roy Warren
Planning Manager

[redacted]

Annex

Sport England's 'Playing Fields Policy and Guidance Document' is available to view at: www.sportengland.org/playingfieldspolicy

The Five Exceptions to Sport England's Playing Fields Policy are:

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.