

By email only

Date: 3rd February 2026

FAO Naomi Reynard

Application Reference: 25/03080/HYA

Site: GA2, Land North-East of Great Ashby, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

Proposal: Hybrid application for a residential-led development comprising residential (Use Class C3), educational use (Use Class F1), a community hub (Use Class F2) with associated new internal roads, access, parking, cycling infrastructure, landscaping and other associated infrastructure.

Sport England Reference: PA/26/E/NH/72955

Sport England's Position

Community Sports Facility Provision

An **objection** is made to the proposals for community sports facility provision to meet the needs of the proposed development in its current form due to the lack of confirmed proposals. This position would be reviewed if it was proposed that appropriate financial contributions would be made towards off-site indoor and outdoor sports facility provision, secured through a planning obligation, as set out in this response. It should also be confirmed whether the community hall will be designed to accord with Sport England's Village and Community Halls design guidance so that a minimum specification can be prepared for inclusion in a planning obligation.

Primary School

It is **requested** that provision be made for the community use of the primary school sports facilities to be secured.

Active Design

A planning condition is **requested** requiring details to be submitted and approved which demonstrate how Active Design principles have been considered in the design and layout of reserved matters applications.

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the above application.

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](#). This application falls within the scope of the above guidance as it relates to a development of more than 300 dwellings.

Sport England assesses this type of application in line with its planning objectives and with the National Planning Policy Framework (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 here:

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

The Proposal and Assessment against Sport England's Objectives and the NPPF

Community Sports Facility Provision

Introduction

The proposal is a hybrid planning application for a mixed use residential led development of up to 640 dwellings and supporting infrastructure on land to the north east of Great Ashby which is allocated for residential development in the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The population of the proposed development is estimated to be around 1,536 based on the applicant's estimate set out in the Environmental Statement (Chapter 13: Socio-Economics and Health). This additional population will generate additional demand for sports facilities. If this demand is not adequately met then it will place additional pressure on existing sports facilities, thereby creating or exacerbating deficiencies in facility provision in the local area. In accordance with the NPPF, Sport England seeks to ensure that the development meets any new community sports facility needs arising as a result of the development. In this context, I would wish to make the following comments on the community sports provision aspects of the planning application.

Evidence Base and Policy Context

The evidence base for community sport and local planning policy context can be summarised as follows:

- The adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031) includes policy SP10 which requires appropriate levels of new community, cultural, leisure and built sport & recreation facilities to be provided in new development. Policy NE6 supports development proposals that make provision for new/improved open space which meets the needs arising from the development and contributes towards improving the provision, quality and accessibility of open space.

- The North Hertfordshire Developer Contributions SPD (2023) requires 1.2 hectares of sports pitches per 1,000 population as part of a wider outdoor sports facility standard of 1.6 hectares per 1000 population and advises that in the calculation of playing pitch/outdoor sport, Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator should be used to estimate demands that will be generated from the new development in conjunction with the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan to identify where demand should be met. The SPD also expects new developments to contribute proportionately towards the provision of additional indoor sports facilities to meet future demands and the advises that Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator will be used to inform calculations for the level of contributions to be sought. The Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy and Action Plan will be used to identify relevant and appropriate projects to which contributions will be used towards.
- North Hertfordshire District Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (2025) <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/planning-strategies/sports-strategies> and the emerging and Indoor Sports Facility Strategy which is now at an advanced stage of preparation collectively provide the evidence base for community outdoor and indoor sports facilities in North Hertfordshire and both documents propose that developer contributions should be secured towards the provision and/or enhancement of outdoor and indoor sports facilities which is justified by the range of quantitative and/or qualitative deficiencies identified in the assessments that support these strategies. Part 7 (Housing Growth Scenarios) of the Playing Pitch Strategy includes Scenario 4 which estimates the demand for playing pitch provision from the Great Ashby GA2 residential allocation and identifies options for projects that financial contributions could be used towards.

In view of the local planning policy and evidence base context, it is considered that in accordance with Government policy in paragraph 103 of the NPPF, a robust local basis exists for justifying the provision of outdoor and indoor community sports facility provision to be made by this development proposal.

Outdoor Sports Facility Provision

No on-site proposals are made for dedicated community outdoor sports facility provision with the focus being on open space provision for informal recreation and children's play. Reference is made in the Draft Heads of Terms (Section 106 Agreement) which forms part of the Planning Statement and the Design & Access Statement to outdoor sports provision being dealt with through financial contributions that would be secured through a section 106 agreement. The contributions would be used to improve existing outdoor sports facilities in the local area to meet the additional demand generated.

The application's approach to meeting the additional outdoor sports needs generated has been informed by advice provided at the pre-application stage by

Sport England. As set out in the Council's Developer Contributions SPD, Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator should be used for estimating the demands for outdoor sport that will be generated by new development. Team data from North Hertfordshire District Council's Playing Pitch Strategy is applied to the Playing Pitch Calculator which can then assess the demand generated in playing pitch equivalents (and the associated capital costs of delivery) by the population generated in a new residential development. I have used the calculator for estimating the demand generated by the estimated population of the development (1,536) and I append a WORD document which provides the outputs.

It is apparent from the calculator outputs that for most playing pitch types with the exception of youth football, the development would not generate sufficient demand to justify on-site playing pitch provision as there would be insufficient demand for most of the pitch types to justify an entire pitch. While there would be sufficient demand to justify one youth football pitch on-site, in practice it would not be desirable from an operational perspective to provide a small playing pitch site that would be difficult to maintain and less responsive to user needs. Furthermore, as set out in the Design and Access Statement, the topography of the site and the overhead powerlines constrain the potential of the site to provide a large multi-pitch playing field site within the development.

A financial contribution being secured towards off-site provision would therefore be considered appropriate on this occasion rather than on-site provision as part of the development. The Council would be recommended to use the figures from the Playing Pitch Calculator outputs (Part 3) as a starting point for informing the level of a financial contribution. The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy should be used for informing the priority projects that the contributions should be used for. The projects for using financial contributions towards should also be discussed with Stevenage Borough Council given that it is expected that all of the projects that would help address the demand generated from this site will be in Stevenage rather than the North Hertfordshire settlements given the functional relationship of the site with the existing urban area of Stevenage and lack of local opportunities for investment in facilities within North Hertfordshire district.

Indoor Sports Facility Provision

As indoor sports facilities are strategic facilities that serve large populations and as the population generated by the proposed development in isolation would not be sufficient to justify the provision of a conventional facility on-site (see below Sports Facility Calculator figures), it is considered that off-site provision in the form of a financial contribution towards the provision or improvement of off-site facilities would be the most suitable form of provision on this occasion. In this regard, contributions towards sports hall and swimming pool facilities should be directed towards projects in Stevenage given the functional relationship of the site with Stevenage and the lack of local indoor facilities within North Hertfordshire.

As set out in the Council's Developer Contributions SPD, Sport England's Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) can help to provide an indication of the likely demand that will be generated by a development for certain facility types including sports halls and swimming pools. The appended SFC outputs should be used as a starting point for informing the level of a financial contribution.

It is noted from the Design & Access Statement that a community hall is proposed that is envisaged will be designed in accordance with Sport England's Village and Community Halls design guidance <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/sports-halls>.

Community halls can be designed so that they are suitable for badminton, dance, fitness and martial arts while fitness suites and activity studios can be provided as part of community halls. A suitably designed community hall in the centre of the development could help meet some of the development's indoor sports needs in an accessible location that would be in close proximity to where residents live which would be welcomed. However, if a community hall is to be designed in accordance with Sport England's design guidance, further advice from Sport England should be sought as a minimum specification for such a facility would need to be included in a planning obligation in order to provide certainty that a facility would be delivered that would accord with this guidance in practice

Conclusion

While the planning application proposes that sports facility provision be made off-site and this is welcomed in principle as set out above, as there are no confirmed proposals at this stage for meeting the development's formal outdoor or indoor sports facility needs, an **objection** is made to the planning application in its current form. However, I would be willing to withdraw this objection in due course if it is confirmed that appropriate financial contributions, secured through a planning obligation as set out above, will be made towards the provision of indoor and outdoor sports facilities and the expected level of the contributions is confirmed together with the projects that the contributions will be used towards. The advice set out above should be used to inform the scale of the contributions and the projects that the contributions are used towards. Confirmation should also be provided of whether a community hall will be designed in accordance with Sport England's design guidance so that a minimum specification can be included in a planning obligation.

Primary School

The proposed primary school would be expected to provide some sport and recreation facilities for meeting educational needs that could also be used by the community outside of school hours such as the playing field and the school hall. While these facilities are principally for school use and would be designed for

primary school aged children and should not be considered as a substitute for dedicated community facilities, they would offer potential to complement the off-site provision made for dedicated community sports facility provision. While there is limited detail of what would be provided on the school site, to ensure that the school's facilities are secured for community use in practice, I would **request** that any planning permission makes provision for securing the community use of the sports facilities provided on the primary school sites. A formal community use agreement would be the appropriate mechanism for securing community use. Without a formal community use agreement being secured there would be no certainty that the facilities would be accessible to the community in practice after they have been built. Condition 16 from our model planning conditions schedule <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/planning-sport/planning-applications> should be used as a basis for securing this through a planning permission.

Active Design

Sport England, supported by Active Travel England and OHID, has produced 'Active Design' <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design>, a guide to planning new developments that create the right environment to help people get more active. The guidance sets out ten key principles for ensuring new developments incorporate opportunities for people to take part in sport and physical activity. The Active Design principles are aimed at contributing towards the Government's desire for the planning system to promote healthy communities through good urban design which is consistent with paragraph 96 of the NPPF. Sport England commends the use of the guidance in the master planning process for new residential developments.

It is welcomed that as set out in the Design & Access Statement the open spaces and the wider development will be designed with reference to Active Design principles in order to create environments that allow people to lead more physically active and healthy lifestyles. The development proposals offer opportunities for incorporating the active design principles and many of the indicative proposals in the outline application are welcomed and considered to be consistent with the principles. In particular, the proposals for co-locating community facilities, the network of active travel routes and the range of multi-functional open space.

If the application is approved, to help ensure that designing to encourage physical activity is given appropriate consideration in practice when reserved matters applications are prepared, Sport England would **request** a planning condition be imposed requiring details to be submitted and approved which demonstrate how promoting physical activity has been considered in the design and layout of the development. The Active Design guidance includes a checklist that can be applied

to developments and it is recommended that the checklist is used to inform the provision of such details and included in a document such as a Design & Access Statement or Health Impact Assessment. A suggested planning condition is as follows:

“For each parcel/phase of development for which Outline permission is granted, no development in relation to that parcel/phase shall commence until details have been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority to demonstrate how Active Design principles have been met.

Reason: To promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity and to accord with Development Plan policy.

Informative: Consideration should be given to using the Active Design checklist in Sport England’s Active Design Guidance to assess reserved matters planning applications”

We would also request that Active Design is considered through the maintenance and management proposals for the green infrastructure and if active travel options are promoted in residents welcome packs to encourage walking and cycling. Sport England would welcome discussions with the applicant in due course to provide further advice on how Active Design can be considered in the detailed proposals.

I hope that these comments can be given full consideration when a decision is made. I would be happy to discuss the response with the local planning authority and/or the applicant as the determination of the application progresses. Please contact me if you have any queries.

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 agendas, report(s) and committee date(s). We would be grateful if you would advise us of the outcome of the application by sending us a copy of the decision notice.

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

Yours sincerely,

Roy Warren
Planning Manager

