

By email only

Date: 7th September 2026

FAO Intan Keen

Application Reference: 25/02571/OP

Site: BA1 (Land East Of North Rd And North Of Railway Line); BA10 (Land Between Railway Line And Royston Rd); BA3 (Land West Of A505); BA2 (Land South Of Clothall Rd); Walls Field; Urban Open Land West Of A505, And Land West Of North Road, Baldock

Proposal: Growing Baldock Development Site: Outline planning application with all matters reserved for up to 3,200 homes etc

Sport England Reference: PA/25/E/NH/72110

Thank you for consulting Sport England on the additional information submitted to support the above application. This response should be treated as supplementing our initial formal response dated 12th November 2025.

Community Sports Facility Provision

The 'Supplementary Information – August 2026 – Appendix G' document titled 'Response to Sport England and NHC Parks and Leisure' is the most relevant document as this sets out the proposed Heads of Terms for a section 106 agreement relating to sports facilities and the community building as well as commentary on the facilities not proposed in the Heads of Terms.

Since our initial response was submitted the applicant has engaged positively and constructively with Sport England with a view to addressing the queries and issues raised in the response. The information requested in the initial response has now been substantially provided. The approach to outdoor and indoor sports provision that is proposed in the application is welcomed in most respects as set out in our initial response and the proposals in the draft Heads of Terms would provide for the delivery of a large proportion of the facilities needed to meet the additional demand generated by the development either on-site or off-site.

However, as set out in the Response to Sport England and NHC Parks and Leisure, there is only a commitment in the Heads of Terms to provide one 3G artificial grass pitch on the secondary school site or Urban Open Land (all 3 options for the Urban Open Land). It is also not proposed to provide additional changing, toilet and refreshment facilities to support community use of the 3G artificial grass pitch and games courts if a secondary school is delivered (options 1 and 3 for the Urban Open Land). There is also no clear commitment at this stage to provide off-site financial contributions to improving rugby union, hockey and swimming facilities to address the additional demand generated. I would provide the following commentary on these matters:

- 3G Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs). The Design and Access Statement indicated that for all 3 options for the secondary school and Urban Open Land, two all weather pitches would be provided for meeting community needs. In our initial response, this approach was supported by Sport England and the Football Foundation (who represent the FA and Hertfordshire FA) because providing 2 x 3G AGPs would offset the level of natural turf football pitch provision proposed within the development being below that required to meet the demand generated by the development. As shown in the Playing Pitch Calculator outputs that have been provided, the development would be expected to generate demand for the equivalent of 1.68 adult football pitches, 4.97 youth football pitches and 3.51 mini football pitches. The indicative plans for the Eastern Park included in Appendix A of the Green Infrastructure Strategy show that this site would only have capacity for 2 adult or 2 youth football pitches although the demand generated by the development would be equivalent to 6-7 adult and youth pitches in total. The provision of a second 3G AGP would be considered to offset this shortfall due the additional capacity offered by AGPs due to their all weather surface, multiple pitch markings and lighting. The first 3G AGP is needed principally for meeting the additional football training demand generated by the development as shown in the Playing Pitch Calculator outputs and would therefore not have the capacity to meet match play demand that would usually be accommodated on natural turf pitches.

The commitment in the Heads of Terms to now only provide 1 x AGP would mean that much of the 4-5 pitch shortfall in adult and youth football pitches would now not be met by the development because there are no alternative on-site or off-site proposals. This would therefore place further pressure on existing local football pitch facilities that are already operating at capacity during peak periods which would be compounded by the on-site football facility provision being provided in the final phases of the development. While other reasons have been put forward to explain the rationale for only providing one 3G AGP, as there is space to accommodate a second 3G AGP on the secondary school or Urban Open Land site, it would appear that the cost of provision is the principal reason in view of the overall project viability.

- Additional Changing, Toilet and Refreshment Facilities on Secondary School Site: While it is acknowledged that one set of changing rooms and WCs will be provided to support the school's facilities, this is based on DfE guidance on requirements for meeting education needs which does not account for 3G AGP provision or the MUGA being floodlit to support community use. During peak periods of community use in the evenings and weekends there will be demand to use changing rooms and WCs by community users of the sports hall, activity studio, fitness suite, MUGA, 3G AGPs and the natural turf playing fields at the same time. Experience from practice has shown that a single set of changing rooms does not offer sufficient capacity to meet this level of demand. This is particularly the case where 3G AGPs are provided due to the potential number of people using an AGP at any given time combined with their back to back use at peak times. This is why where the Football Foundation offer grants towards

new 3G AGP provision on existing secondary school sites providing additional changing capacity is often a pre-requisite of making an award. The Houlton School example in Rugby that has been referenced by the applicant did not include 3G AGP provision.

- Off-site Provision: As set out in our initial response, the Council's recent Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor Sports Strategy provides the evidence to justify the need for the development to contribute towards providing off-site capacity towards meeting the additional demand generated for rugby union, hockey and swimming facilities. These strategies also provide advice on the high priority projects in the local area that contributions can be directed towards to help meet the additional demand. If financial contributions are not secured existing local facilities may not have capacity to accommodate the additional demand that will be generated.

It should be emphasised the proposed Heads of Terms for the sports facilities and community building are otherwise welcomed as they are responsive to advice provided by Sport England.

Due to the proposals in their current form not fully meeting the additional demand generated by the development for natural turf football pitches, ancillary facilities for meeting shared use facilities on the secondary school site, rugby union facilities, hockey facilities and swimming facilities, the **objection** in our initial response would be maintained. However, in acknowledgement that the applicant may not be able to address these concerns due to financial viability considerations, without prejudice to this position, if the Council is minded to approve the application in its current form, it is requested that planning obligations make provision for the following to help ensure that the proposals that the applicant has made are delivered in practice and are fit for purpose:

Planning Obligations

- Provision for the Eastern Park formal open space to be delivered in accordance with the outline specification in the Heads of Terms. Consideration will also need to be given to how the stewardship arrangements in terms of tenure, land transfer, management and maintenance arrangements for this open space will be addressed.
- Provision for the Urban Open Land formal open space (in school outcome 2) to be delivered in accordance with the outline specification in the Heads of Terms. Consideration will also need to be given to how the stewardship arrangements in terms of tenure, land transfer, management and maintenance arrangements for this open space will be addressed.
- Provision for a financial contribution towards the costs of expanding sports hall facilities as part of the Knights Templar School expansion (in school outcome 2) which should be informed by the Sports Facility Calculator outputs.

- Provision for the sports facilities for the secondary school (school outcomes 1 and 3) to be delivered in accordance with the outline specification in the Heads of Terms including an additional payment for an uplift to account for the facility size and design differences between DfE and Sport England requirements for sports halls and games courts.
- Provision for the community building to be delivered in accordance with the outline specification in the Heads of Terms. Consideration will also need to be given to how the stewardship arrangements in terms of tenure, land transfer, management and maintenance arrangements for this facility will be addressed.
- Subject to financial viability, provision for financial contributions to be secured towards enhancing the capacity of off-site rugby union, hockey and swimming facilities. The Playing Pitch Calculator and Sports Facility Calculator outputs should be used for informing the financial contributions and the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor Sports Facility Strategy for informing the projects the contributions should be directed towards.

Planning Conditions:

- Provision for a community use agreement for the secondary school (school outcomes 1 and 3). While the draft condition suggested by the applicant is broadly acceptable as it is based on Sport England's model condition 16 <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/planning-sport/planning-applications>, the scope of the agreement will need to be extended beyond the 3G AGP and the sports hall to include the MUGA, activity studio, fitness suite and natural turf playing fields.
- As requested in our initial response, provision should be made for community use agreements for the primary school sites – see condition 16 of the model condition schedule.
- As requested in our initial response, provision should be made for the submission and approval of the design and layout of the outdoor sports facilities and parking on all sites – see condition 9a of the model conditions schedule.
- As requested in our initial response, provision should be made for the submission and approval of a sports pitch feasibility study and construction specification for the Eastern Park's and Urban Open Land's (school outcome 2) natural turf playing fields to ensure that the construction and design of natural turf playing pitches is fit for purpose – see condition 10a of model conditions schedule.

Active Design

The comments made in our initial response would still apply i.e. 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.

Community Asset Management

The comments made in our initial response would still apply i.e. it is requested that provision should be made through a planning obligation for the stewardship body to have sufficient resources for staffing and programmes to activate community development programmes including sport and physical activity.

I hope that these comments are helpful and 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.

Yours sincerely,

Roy Warren
Planning Manager

E: roy.warren@sportengland.org

