

North Hertfordshire District Council

By email only

Date: 28th May 2026

FAO Saffron Loasby

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

Application Reference: 26/00997/S73

Site: Hitchin Cricket Ground, Lucas Lane, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 2JA

Proposal: Variation of Condition 25 of Development B of planning permission 15/00192/1 granted 22.03.2016 and varied by condition 8 of 22/03044/S73 granted 22.02.2023. Extension of hours of the All-Weather Pitch to Thursdays – 09.00 – 22.00 hours Fridays – 09.00 – 22.00 hours Saturdays – 09.00 – 18.30 hours Sundays and Bank Holidays – 09.00 – 18.00 hours.

Sport England Reference: PA/26/E/NH/73956

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 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.

Assessment against Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and NPPF

In summary, the application involves a variation of planning condition 25 imposed on Development B of planning permission 15/00192/1 (as varied by condition 8 of planning permission 22/03044/S73) which related to the original planning permission for the artificial grass pitch (AGP) at Hitchin Cricket Club's site which is used by Blueharts Hockey Club.

The current planning permission restricts use of the AGP after 18.30 on Saturdays. Blueharts Hockey Club's first team has just been promoted to the England Hockey's National League for the 2026/27 hockey season which begins in September 2026. As fixtures in the National League can finish after 18.30 on Saturdays, the club would like the flexibility to allow this if required. An extension of the permitted hours to 20.00 on Saturdays is therefore sought. The impact in practice is expected to be limited as there are only nine home fixtures per season for the club's first team in this league and most would be expected to finish by 18.30. The current planning permission already allows the AGP to be used until 22.00 on Mondays to Fridays. The extension to the hours of use would offer the club greater flexibility to ensure that matches in the National League can be completed within the permitted hours of use. Sport England is therefore supportive of the proposed variation of the condition.

Extending the hours of use of the AGP as proposed would therefore have a positive impact on the playing field as it would help address the hockey club's fixture needs following the first team's promotion. Consequently, Sport England is of the view that the proposal meets the intentions of exception 5 of our playing fields policy, in that it constitutes enhanced use of a facility where the benefits to the development of sport outweigh any impact on the playing field.

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 and is **supportive** of the proposed variation of condition as a non-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

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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.