

PENTANGLE DESIGN LTD

Chartered Architects — Hitchin

PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Proposed Floodlighting to One Rugby Training Pitch

(6no lighting columns and 14no luminaires)

Hitchin Rugby Limited (Hitchin Rugby Football Club)

King George V Playing Fields, Old Hale Way, Hitchin SG5 1XL

Local Planning Authority: North Hertfordshire District Council

Prepared by Pentangle Design Ltd

Planning Submission — August 2026

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The Site	4
3. Proposed Design	7
4. Reasons for the Development	9
5. Access	10
6. Planning Policy Assessment	11
7. Open Space and Residential Amenity	13
8. The Case for Approval	14
9. Submitted Documents	15
10. Conclusions	15

1. Introduction

1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Pentangle Design Ltd in support of a full planning application made on behalf of Hitchin Rugby Limited (Hitchin Rugby Football Club) for the installation of new floodlighting to one rugby training pitch at King George V Playing Fields, off Old Hale Way, Hitchin, within the administrative area of North Hertfordshire District Council.



1.2 The proposal comprises 6no lighting columns and 14no luminaires, designed by Highlights Floodlighting Ltd using Philips OptiVision LED gen3.5 luminaires (product family BVP528), to provide a maintained illuminance of 200 lux to the training pitch. There is existing floodlighting to two pitches at the ground, and to the multi-use games area at the south-western corner of the park; this application adds a modern installation to a third pitch.

1.3 This statement should be read alongside the application drawings, the specialist floodlighting design and spillage calculations prepared by Highlights Floodlighting Ltd, and the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by Coyne Environmental Ltd. It describes the site and its context, the proposed development, the reasons for it, the approach to access, an assessment against national and local planning policy, and a proportionate statement on open space and residential amenity — the principal sensitivity, given the site's position within the built-up area. It concludes that the proposal is well designed and accords with the development plan for the area.

2. The Site



2.1 The application site comprises part of King George V Playing Fields, off Old Hale Way — also referred to by the District Council as King George V Recreation Ground — a recreation ground within the built-up area of Hitchin used by Hitchin RFC. The Club has three pitches and a clubhouse on the eastern boundary. The pitch to be lit is a rugby training pitch. There is already floodlighting to two existing pitches, as well as to the multi-use games area at the south-western corner of the park, and the adjoining school grounds have their own floodlit pitches.

2.2 The immediately adjoining buildings are The Priory School to the north and Strathmore Infant and Nursery School to the east, which sit alongside the ground; residential properties lie at a reasonable distance to the west and south-west of the site, the nearest being those on Bedford Road. A belt of mature trees runs along the northern edge. The adjoining schools are largely unoccupied during the evening hours when the floodlighting would operate, which is a favourable starting point for the amenity assessment; nonetheless, spill and glare are controlled at source.



View of the pitch to be floodlit from south east corner. Aerial view from west.



The clubhouse and existing floodlit main pitch; trees along the northern boundary of the site

Designations and constraints

2.3 The following designations and constraints have been reviewed against the North Hertfordshire adopted policies map, the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning and MAGIC.

- The recreation ground lies within the built-up area of Hitchin.
- Protected open space. The recreation ground is publicly accessible open space within the settlement, to which Policy NE4 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan applies. The proposal involves no loss of open space and is addressed at Sections 6 and 8.
- Flood risk. The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning shows the site lies within Flood Zone 1, an area of low probability of river and sea flooding. Addressed at Section 3.
- Biodiversity. The northern tree belt is a potential bat commuting and foraging feature. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been carried out by Coyne Environmental Ltd and accompanies the application; its findings are set out at Section 7.
- Trees. Boundary tree cover along the northern edge is recorded in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. The proposed columns stand 5m back from the playing area and

clear of the boundary tree belt, and the pitch itself is being moved 10m to the south to increase that separation.

Land ownership and applicant

2.4 The freehold of King George V Playing Fields is owned by North Hertfordshire District Council, which holds the land as trustee of King George's Field, Hitchin, on behalf of Fields in Trust. The Club occupies the land under a 99-year lease granted on 3 March 2015 and expiring on 2 March 2114, leaving approximately 88 years unexpired. As the Club is not the freeholder, Ownership Certificate B has been completed and notice served on North Hertfordshire District Council as landowner.

2.5 The Club has been based at King George V Playing Fields for over sixty years, and the length of the unexpired term reflects the long-term commitment that the proposed investment in permanent lighting infrastructure represents.

3. Proposed Design

3.1 The proposal is for the installation of new floodlighting to one rugby training pitch. As part of this process the pitch will be moved 10m to the south, to increase separation from the mature tree belt on the northern boundary and reduce light spill towards it. No change is proposed to the clubhouse or to the use of the site; the development is confined to the lighting columns, luminaires and associated cabling and controls.



3.2 The scheme comprises 6no columns (type HL250D15F) of 15.0m height, carrying 14no Philips OptiVision LED gen3.5 luminaires (product family BVP528, 1,506W, 4000K) in total — the two end columns (nos. 1 and 6) each carry three luminaires and the four side columns each carry two. Twelve luminaires light the pitch itself and two provide back-lighting to a 65m x 15m area to the rear. The luminaires have polycarbonate optics, an asymmetric beam distribution, a zero Upward Light Ratio (0.00), and integral OptiVision louvres to control spill and glare at source; in addition, 600mm x 600mm rear louvre plates have been fitted to the 7no boundary-adjacent luminaires for further spill reduction — of particular importance in this within-settlement location. The columns stand 5m back from the playing area and the aiming offset is 35 degrees. The design achieves a maintained illuminance of 200 lux with a minimum/average uniformity of 0.60, meeting RFU criteria, at a total installed load of 21.08kW; it is set out in full in Highlights Floodlighting Ltd's design, spillage results and isolux spillage contour drawings. Cable routes shown on the location plan are indicative and subject to detailed design.

Hours of operation

3.3 The Club has confirmed the proposed pattern of use. Floodlighting would be used on weekday evenings only, during the winter training season — principally late September to March — and only during the hours of darkness; the lights are neither required nor used outside those months, when natural daylight is sufficient. Touch rugby takes place on Monday and Friday evenings, senior training on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and youth training on Wednesday evenings. In each case the lights would be switched off no later than

21:15, that time being the latest they would ever be on, including clearing of the pitch. There would be no floodlit use on Saturdays or Sundays.

3.4 An automatic timed cut-off applies, and the Club is content for these days and hours to be secured by planning condition. The proposed days and hours of use are summarised in the table below.

Proposed typical days and hours of floodlight use

Day	Proposed activity / use	Lights on	Lights off	Notes
Monday	Touch rugby	Dusk	21:15	Adult mixed-ability touch section
Tuesday	Senior training	dusk	21:15	
Wednesday	Youth training	dusk	21:15	Mini and Youth age groups, term time
Thursday	Senior training	dusk	21:15	
Friday	Touch rugby	dusk	21:15	Adult mixed-ability touch section
Saturday	No floodlit use	—	—	
Sunday	No floodlit use	—	—	

3.5 In addition, the Club seeks the ability to extend use to 22:00 on a maximum of four occasions per season, to cover games in which extra time or an injury stoppage causes play to run beyond the normal switch-off time. Any condition is invited to be framed accordingly.

Floodlights are operated only during the hours of darkness, principally the winter training season (typically late September to March), and not when natural daylight is sufficient. Switch-off times are the latest the lights would ever be on, including clearing of the pitch.

Flood risk

3.6 The site lies within Flood Zone 1, an area of low probability of river and sea flooding. The proposal is operational development only and introduces no new buildings, no floorspace and no more vulnerable use; the columns have a negligible footprint, and floodlighting to outdoor sport is in any event a water-compatible use, appropriate across all flood zones. On this basis a Flood Risk Assessment is not considered necessary.

4. Reasons for the Development

4.1 Hitchin Rugby Football Club — constituted as Hitchin Rugby Limited, a registered charity — was established in 1954 and has been based at King George V Playing Fields for over sixty years. Its charitable purpose is to promote participation in rugby at all age levels in the Hitchin area. It runs Mini (U5–U12), Youth boys (U13–U18), Youth girls (U12–U18), Senior men's, Women's and Vets (35+) sections, together with adult touch rugby; the women's section was founded in 1992. The Club holds the RFU's Whole Club Seal of Approval, awarded for its coaching, inclusivity and safeguarding of children and young people.

4.2 The scale of the junior operation is at the heart of this application. The Mini and Youth Section, founded in September 1988, now has over 600 children playing from U6 to U18, making Hitchin RFC the largest team sports club in the local area in any sport. Those children come from across Hitchin and the surrounding villages, and the youth age groups train in the evening during term time.

4.3 That is the constraint the proposal addresses. From late September to March, useable daylight ends before the school and working day does. The Club has two floodlit pitches available for twelve squads needing a midweek evening slot, so training is not stopped but rationed: sessions are shortened, age groups share space, some squads train less often than RFU guidance envisages, and the whole winter's use is concentrated onto the existing lit surfaces, which are heavily worn by midwinter. Meanwhile the pitch that is the subject of this application stands unused from dusk for half the year. Lighting it would also allow more fifteen-a-side rugby to be played on weekday evenings.

4.4 The principal benefits of the proposal are:

- Additional midweek capacity for the Mini and Youth sections — for whom an early-evening midweek window is the only realistic training option in term time.
- Support for the growth of the girls' and women's game — where participation has outpaced the training capacity currently available to those squads.
- Support for touch rugby — the Monday and Friday sessions are a lower-contact, mixed-ability format that brings in adults who are new to the Club and, in many cases, new to team sport.
- Relief of pressure on the two existing floodlit pitches — improving surface condition and training conditions for everyone using them.
- Better and safer training conditions — a properly designed 200 lux LED installation provides an even, glare-controlled standard of light.
- A modern, low-impact installation — LED luminaires with polycarbonate optics, an asymmetric beam distribution, a zero Upward Light Ratio and integral OptiVision louvres, controlling spill and glare at source.

4.5 The Club's role extends beyond its own membership. It hosts county festivals and tournaments for visiting clubs from across Hertfordshire, and runs walking rugby for older

participants. All coaches and volunteers hold enhanced DBS clearance and work to the RFU Child Safeguarding Policy.

4.6 The Club's commitment to the site is long term. It holds a 99-year lease from the District Council with some 88 years unexpired, and the proposed investment in permanent lighting infrastructure reflects that. The scheme is supported by the Rugby Football Union through its Floodlight Investment Programme, an award made on the RFU's own assessment that the facility is well used, well governed and capable of growing participation. That aligns with Sport England's objective of increasing activity among under-represented groups, and with the Local Plan's support for improving existing recreational facilities.

4.7 Alistair Strathern MP, Member of Parliament for Hitchin, has confirmed his support for the scheme and has provided a letter of support to the Council for consideration alongside the application.

5. Access

5.1 The site continues to be served by its existing access and parking arrangements accessed from Old Hale Way; no new or altered access onto the public highway is proposed, and the lighting works generate no additional traffic beyond enabling evening use of a training pitch that would otherwise stand idle after dusk. The improved quality and evenness of the lighting benefits all users, including those with visual impairment.

5.2 There are bus stops on Old Hale Way, near the site entrance with the 9A service providing services to the town centre and towards Bedford and Stevenage.

6. Planning Policy Assessment

7.1 The application site is an established recreation ground in sporting and recreational use. The proposal involves no change of use and no loss of open space or playing surface; it adds lighting infrastructure to a training pitch already in use. Outdoor sport and recreation is supported in principle by national policy and by Policy NE4 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, which protects publicly accessible open space while supporting improvements that do not harm its function. The works are confined to lighting; the pitch and open space are retained in full, and no new buildings are proposed beyond the lighting columns themselves.

7.2 The application falls to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan comprises the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031 (adopted 8 November 2022), with the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) and Planning Practice Guidance as material considerations.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

7.3 The NPPF attaches significant weight to the provision and improvement of sports and recreation facilities: paragraph 103 recognises that opportunities for sport and physical activity are important to the health and well-being of communities, and paragraph 104(c) resists the loss of playing fields except where equivalent or better provision is made. Paragraph 198(c) requires decisions to limit the impact of light pollution on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation. The proposal responds directly through its asymmetric, louvred, zero-upward-light design and its bounded curfew, and involves no loss of playing field.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031

7.4 The scheme is assessed against the following adopted policies:

- Policy D1 (Sustainable Design) — the operative design and quality policy, which includes the control of external lighting and light pollution. The asymmetric and louvred optics, the zero Upward Light Ratio and the additional rear louvre plates to the boundary-adjacent luminaires are the principal measures, demonstrated by the accompanying floodlighting design and spillage calculations.
- Policy D3 (Protecting living conditions) — the leading policy for this site. Highlights Floodlighting Ltd has carried out vertical illuminance calculations on the boundary elevations of the nearest residential properties, on Bedford Road, which confirm a maximum vertical spill below 5 lux; the isolux spillage contours show the extent of light reaching the site boundaries. Light spill and glare towards neighbouring dwellings are therefore controlled to acceptable levels, and the bounded hours limit the period during which any effect would be experienced.
- Policy NE4 (Protecting publicly accessible open space) — the proposal retains and improves sporting use of the open space without any loss of open space or playing surface (Sections 6 and 8).

- Policy NE9 (Biodiversity and development) — addressed by the accompanying Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and by bat-sensitive lighting which keeps the northern tree belt unlit, consistent with ILP/BCT Guidance Note GN08.

Other guidance

7.5 The lighting design has regard to the Institution of Lighting Professionals' Guidance Note GN01/21 on the reduction of obtrusive light and, for bats, to Guidance Note GN08 ("Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK"). Regard is also had to Sport England and Rugby Football Union guidance on the design of floodlighting to outdoor sports pitches. Highlights Floodlighting Ltd confirms that the design complies with GN01/21 for an Environmental Zone E2 (rural — low district brightness). E2 carries more stringent obtrusive-light limits than the E3 (suburban — medium district brightness) zone that might otherwise be applied to a site within the built-up area; the design has therefore been tested against the more demanding of the two, and the maximum vertical illuminance at the nearest residential façades is below 5 lux. In any event the lights switch off at 21:15, well before the curfew hour to which the tighter post-curfew limits apply.

Ecology and biodiversity net gain

7.6 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Coyne Environmental Ltd; field survey 15 July 2026; report version 2, approved 3 August 2026) accompanies the application. The survey was carried out by Kenneth Coyne CMLI, a licensed bat worker (licence 2015-15943-CLS-CLS), in accordance with CIEEM guidelines, to establish the presence or absence of protected features of ecological importance and of bats as a European Protected Species in particular.

7.7 The appraisal records the site as a well-managed sports ground of amenity grassland with limited ecological interest, natural vegetation being confined to the margins: boundary tree cover of oak, hornbeam, sycamore and goat willow, with a patchy understorey of hawthorn, bramble and nettle, and sparse rough grass. The boundary trees were inspected for holes, fissures, droppings and staining; no evidence of bat roosting was found and the site is assessed as having negligible roost potential. No evidence of badger, reptiles or amphibians was recorded, and no active bird nests were found, though the boundary vegetation offers potential for future nesting. The tree lines are used as ecological corridors by small mammals including hedgehog, a Priority Species.

7.8 On the effect of the proposed lighting, the ecologist notes that the pitches in the adjoining school grounds are already floodlit, and that the clubhouse and car park are lit and in evening use, so the site is not a dark one. The proposed columns are not immediately adjacent to the boundary trees, and the pitch is being moved 10m south to increase that separation further. On that basis the appraisal concludes that bats will continue to forage and commute with minimal disturbance, that the proposal will have only a minimal effect on wildlife generally and on European Protected Species in particular, and that no further ecological survey work is necessary and the application can be determined on that basis. The lighting design supports that conclusion: asymmetric optics, a zero Upward Light Ratio,

integral louvres and the additional rear louvre plates direct light onto the playing surface and away from the northern tree belt, consistent with ILP/BCT Guidance Note GN08.

7.9 Two straightforward precautions are offered and can be secured by condition: that any vegetation clearance and the erection of columns be undertaken outside the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), or following a check by a suitably qualified ecologist; and that the northern boundary tree belt be retained unlit as a dark corridor for bats, hedgehog and other small mammals.

7.10 On Biodiversity Net Gain, the proposal is lighting-only. It involves no change of land use, no construction of buildings and no loss or degradation of habitat, and the column bases cumulatively affect substantially less than 25m² of ground area. The de minimis exemption from the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement is therefore relied upon.

8. Open Space and Residential Amenity

8.1 Residential and open-space amenity is the principal sensitivity for this within-settlement site, and is addressed here against Policy D3 (Protecting living conditions) and Policy NE4 (Protecting publicly accessible open space) of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

- Surrounding receptors. The immediately adjoining buildings are The Priory School to the north and Strathmore Infant and Nursery School to the east, both largely unoccupied during the evening hours when the floodlighting would operate. The nearest residential properties lie at a reasonable distance to the west.
- Design measures. The luminaires have polycarbonate optics, an asymmetric beam distribution, a zero Upward Light Ratio and integral OptiVision louvres controlling spill and glare at source, with 600mm x 600mm rear louvre plates added to the 7no boundary-adjacent luminaires; the training pitch is being moved 10m to the south to increase separation from, and reduce spill towards, the mature tree belt on the northern boundary.
- Spill performance. Highlights Floodlighting Ltd has carried out vertical illuminance calculations on the boundary elevations of the nearest residential properties, on Bedford Road, confirming a maximum vertical spill below 5 lux — within the ILP GN01/21 pre-curfew limit for the more stringent E2 environmental zone. The isolux spillage contours show the extent of light reaching the site boundaries. Light spill towards the nearest houses is therefore controlled to acceptable levels, consistent with Policy D3.
- Hours. Use is confined to weekday evenings in the winter training season, with an automatic cut-off no later than 21:15 — well before the 23:00 curfew hour used in GN01/21 — which limits the period during which any lit effect would be experienced and avoids the late-evening period of greatest sensitivity for neighbouring occupiers.

- Open space. The proposal involves no loss of publicly accessible open space and no change of use; it improves the usability of the existing training pitch, consistent with Policy NE4.

9. The Case for Approval

9.1 Drawing the above together, the proposal accords with the development plan and national policy, for the following reasons:

- It provides new, well-designed floodlighting to an existing rugby training pitch, extending community use without any change of use or loss of open space.
- It employs modern LED luminaires with polycarbonate optics, an asymmetric beam distribution, a zero Upward Light Ratio and integral OptiVision louvres, with additional rear louvre plates to the boundary-adjacent luminaires, controlling spill towards neighbouring homes at source, and is offered subject to a clearly bounded curfew secured by condition.
- It lies within Flood Zone 1 and introduces no new buildings or vulnerable use.
- The vertical illuminance assessment at the nearest residential properties confirms a maximum spill below 5 lux, tested against the more stringent E2 environmental zone.
- The accompanying Preliminary Ecological Appraisal finds no ecology of importance on the site, negligible bat roost potential and only a minimal effect on wildlife and European Protected Species, and concludes that no further ecological survey work is necessary.
- Any residual matters — the precise hours, obtrusive-light limits and the two ecological precautions offered at 7.8 — are capable of control by condition.

10. Submitted Documents

10.1 The application is accompanied by:

- Completed application forms and ownership certificates;
- Site location plan and block plan (with red-line boundary covering all land the works touch);
- Existing and proposed site layout plans showing column and cable-route positions;
- Lighting column and luminaire details / Philips OptiVision specification;
- Floodlighting design (incorporating the ILP GN01/21 compliance statement and vertical illuminance assessment), spillage results and isolux spillage contours (Highlights Floodlighting Ltd, 23 April 2026);
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Coyne Environmental Ltd, version 2, approved 3 August 2026);
- This Planning, Design and Access Statement;
- Letters of support, including from Alistair Strathern MP, Member of Parliament for Hitchin;
- Site photographs.

10.2 A Flood Risk Assessment is not required: the site lies within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal is operational development only.

11. Conclusions

11.1 The proposal installs new floodlighting to a rugby training pitch at King George V Playing Fields, Hitchin, extending community training capacity through the autumn and winter for a registered charity that now has over 600 children playing from U6 to U18 and only two floodlit pitches to accommodate twelve squads.

It is a modern, low-impact installation with modern light fittings designed to control spill beyond the pitch and offered subject to a bounded curfew of 21:15 on weekday evenings. It introduces no change of use and no loss of open space or playing surface. The immediately adjoining buildings are the two schools, which are not in evening use, with residential properties at a reasonable distance to the west and south-west; the vertical illuminance assessment at those properties confirms a maximum spill below 5 lux.

The accompanying Preliminary Ecological Appraisal concludes that the effect on wildlife and on European Protected Species would be minimal, with no further survey work required. The proposal accords with the National Planning Policy Framework and with the relevant policies of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031, including Policies D1, D3, NE4 and NE9. It is respectfully submitted that planning permission should be granted.

Pentangle Design Ltd — Chartered Architects — Hitchin

Planning Submission — August 2026