

Education Funding Agency
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

04 September 2014

Our Ref: NW/OD/2014/37210/

Dear Mr Buchanan,

Re: Pre-Application Advice
App Ref: Option B L(9-)007 Rev P1
Site: SADDLEWORTH SCHOOL, High Street, Oldham, OL3 6BU OL3 6BU
Proposal: Replacement school redeveloping the existing site

Summary

The scheme has potential to meet exception E4 of our playing field policy. However, the area of replacement playing field would need to be increased (or clarification provided on area of existing playing field lost to development). As it stands, E4 is not met. Should a satisfactory area of replacement playing field be demonstrated, conditions would be needed to ensure the replacement playing field was designed and constructed in accordance with Natural Turf for Sport, continuity of sporting use was maintained during the construction period, and possibly requiring reinstatement of sport facilities.

Full Response

It is understood that the site forms part of, or constitutes, a playing field as defined in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (Statutory Instrument 2010 No. 2184), in that it is on land that has been used as a playing field within the last five years, and the field encompasses at least one playing pitch of 0.2 ha or more.

Sport England has therefore considered the application in the light of its playing fields policy. The aim of this policy is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of quality pitches to satisfy the current and estimated future demand for pitch sports within the area. The policy seeks to protect all parts of the playing field from development and not just those which, for the time being, are laid out as pitches. The Policy states that:

“Sport England will oppose the granting of planning permission for any development which would lead to the loss of, or would prejudice the use of, all or any part of a playing field, or land last used as a playing field or allocated for use as a playing field in an adopted or draft deposit local plan, unless, in the judgement of Sport England, one of the Specific circumstances applies.”

Reason; Development which would lead to the loss of all or part of a playing field, or which would prejudice its use, should not normally be permitted because it would permanently reduce the opportunities for participation in sporting activities. Government planning policy and the policies of Sport England have recognised the importance of such activities to the social and economic well-being of the country.

The scheme described as Option B proposes to rebuild the school on the existing site in Uppermill. The existing school site includes a range of external and internal sports facilities including:

- Sand based, floodlit artificial grass pitch (AGP)
- Grass football pitch
- Two number netball courts / MUGAs
- 4-court sports hall

The external sports facilities are arranged along the eastern edge of the site. Aerial photographs show the artificial grass pitch having markings for football and rounders. The pitch is available for community use both during and outside of term time (weekday evenings and weekends). The sports hall is also available for community use inside and outside of term time (weekday evenings and Saturday morning).

Option B shows that the existing grass pitch in the north of the site and the MUGA to the south of it would be lost as part of the development. One existing MUGA and the AGP would be retained.

A replacement grass football pitch is proposed on the footprint of existing buildings (following demolition). A new MUGA would be provided alongside it.

In terms of internal sports facilities, the existing sports hall would be retained and a new changing block and activity studio erected alongside it.

The nature of the development means that it would be assessed against exception E4 of our playing field policy which states that:

The playing field or playing fields, which would be lost as a result of the proposed development, would be replaced by a playing field or playing fields of an equivalent or better quality and of equivalent or greater quantity, in a suitable location and subject to equivalent or better

management arrangements, prior to the commencement of development.

In order to meet the quality aspect of E4, the replacement playing field land would need to be designed and constructed in accordance with Natural Turf for Sport (Sport England's technical design guidance). See:

<http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/design-and-cost-guidance/natural-turf-for-sport/>

In terms of quantity, scaling from the Option B drawing suggests the pitch would measure around 73m x 45m. The area of replacement playing field would equate to around 3,900m². Unfortunately I do not have an electronic copy of the existing site plan, but using Google Earth I estimate the area of existing playing field that would be lost to be greater than 3,900m². The area of replacement playing field would therefore need to be increased to meet E4 (or a clarification be provided on the area of playing field lost to the development). Notwithstanding this, the pitch as proposed would not be fit for purpose as the runoffs along the side of the pitch are too narrow.

In terms of pitch sizes, we would recommend that any new pitches accord with current FA guidance on pitch dimensions. Following a review of youth football, pitch sizes (and formats of the game) have been revised from youth level through to senior level. New pitch size guidance was subsequently issued and these dimensions are to become mandatory for competitive football. See:

<http://www.thefa.com/my-football/football-volunteers/runningaclub/yourfacilities/technicalstandards>

Clearly, the replacement pitch would not be provided prior to the existing pitch being lost to development. However, on a school site with limited available space, an exception to the timing requirement of E4 would be made.

Assuming the area and pitch are amended, there would be the need for planning conditions to meet E4. These would:

1. Require the replacement playing field to be designed and constructed in accordance with Natural turf for Sport
2. Seek to ensure that any temporary classrooms, storage compounds etc. were not located on pitches, MUGAs etc, or if they were then reinstatement would be needed following completion of the works.
3. Require a scheme to be submitted to ensure continuity of sporting use during the works period (ie showing what off site facilities would be used to meet the sporting needs).

In conclusion, whilst the scheme has potential to meet E4 some further information would be required to demonstrate equivalent quantity, and should this be shown conditions would be required.

If you would like any further information or advice please contact the undersigned at the address below.

Yours sincerely

Paul Daly
Planning Manager

T: 07920 701425

E: Paul.Daly@sportengland.org