WYTHENSHAWE SPORTS GROUND, FOOTBALL HUB

Playing Field Statement

SUMMARY

Playing Field Statement in support of proposed Wythenshawe Sports Ground Creation of 4Nr. 3G Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, 18Nr. floodlights, a maintenance storage container and a Huddle unit.

Manchester City Council

Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION 2

2.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND 3

3.0 APPLICATION DETAILS 5

Application Site 5

Map 1 – Proposed Location of Development 6

Map 2 – Proposed Sports Facility Configuration 7

Site Suitability 8

Current Facilities at the Sports Ground 9

4.0 PROJECT AND SPORTING BENEFITS 11

Project Benefits 11

Sporting Benefits 12

Summary Position 13

5.0 LINKS TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL STRATEGIES 15

Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (2022) 15

Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (2022) 15

Manchester Local Football Facility Plan (2023) 16

6.0 PLANNING POLICY 17

Sport England Playing Fields Policy and Guidance (Updated 2021) 17

National Planning Policy Framework (Updated 2024) 17

Manchester Core Strategy 18

Places for Everyone – Greater Manchester Joint Development Plan (2024) 18

7.0 LOCAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION 19

8.0 CURRENT AND PROPOSED SITE USAGE 22

Ancillary Provision 23

Community Use, Management and Maintenance 24

Conclusion 25

9.0 CONCLUSIONS 26

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0 This Playing Field Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for development proposals at Wythenshawe Sports Ground. The proposals are for:

"Creation of 4Nr. 3G Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) with perimeter fencing, hardstanding areas, 18Nr. floodlights, a maintenance storage container and a Huddle unit."

1.2 This Statement explains the aspirations for the project and provides the evidence and justification illustrating the need for the new sports facilities, and provision of ancillary facilities and other associated works to comply with Sport England Playing Fields Policy Exception E2, and E5 and paragraph 104(c) of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2.0 Project Background

2.1 Wythenshawe Sports Ground (WSG) has been identified as a priority Football Hub site, as part of the Football Foundation (FF) Football Hubs Investment Programme to address shortfalls in 3G football facilities within the locality area; and provide a platform for significant growth, both in financial revenue and local participation, with a focus on tackling health inequalities facing Wythenshawe communities and neighbouring conurbations.

2.2 Wythenshawe Sports Ground (WSG) has been identified as a priority investment site for a Football Foundation (FF) Football Hub and new 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) provision, due to its scale, location, physical size, and established mix of community football and wider multi-sport use. The Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy 2022–2031 (PPOSS) identifies significant capacity pressures on existing 3G AGP provision in the Wythenshawe area, exacerbated by high levels of imported demand from Trafford. In response, Manchester City Council (MCC) and Trafford Council have agreed a joint approach to 3G AGP development to address identified shortfalls in Wythenshawe and North Trafford. Investment at WSG therefore presents a significant opportunity to meet current and future demand, support growth in local football and multi-sport participation, and deliver wider social, educational, and health outcomes for communities in Wythenshawe and the surrounding conurbation.

2.3 FF Football Hub Programme is a national grant programme available to Local Authorities that aims to create sustainable multi-pitch sites, through investment into 3G AGPs capable of generating surpluses for local re-investment, reducing reliance on public sector funding to drive sustainable growth in areas of highest need and demand.

2.4 Football Hub sites typically include a mix of 3G and grass sport pitches, serviced by a multi-purpose building that accommodates changing, community/education space, café, and car parking. Hub sites can also include PlayZone facilities, (multi use areas for sport and recreation) and other community facilities such as Gyms, Health Services, Play and Recreational spaces.

2.5 A separate planning application (144600/VO/2025) was approved 16th January 2026 for:

"Refurbishment of existing sports pavilion (Class F2) involving a partial change of use to provide: a weightlifting gym (Class E), ancillary cafe and community room, external alterations, CCTV and lighting, reconfiguration to the existing hard

landscaping to enable a widened pedestrian footpath, installation of external plant and enclosure and other associated works."

2.6 The renovated pavilion will serve the new 3G AGP development the subject of this planning application, and provide facilities for the Weightlifting Club, which will be relocated from Wythenshawe Park due to the establishment of the Wythenshawe Park Multi Sport and Health and Well Being Hub (144282/VO/2025), approved on 19 December 2025.

2.7 In 2022, the combined shortfall of Manchester and Trafford was estimated at 5 Full Size 3G Pitches. Annual monitoring and 2023/24 affiliated data compiled by County Football Associations has identified this position has worsened, with a current projected shortfall of 13 Full Size 3G AGPs. This is largely driven by Trafford 3G AGP shortfalls, which is having a significant impact on access to Wythenshawe 3G AGP Supply. All available AGPs are primarily on school sites, with no Local Authority managed facilities in the area.

2.8 MCC and Trafford Council have established a Football Consortium to guide the strategic investment priorities for Manchester and Trafford, underpinned by LA Football Facility Investment Plans signed off by Football Foundation and the FA. WSG has been identified as a priority site by both LAs to address unmet football demand with further interest and support from Stockport Council due to boundary areas and current level of club use on site.

2.9 MCC, Trafford and Stockport Council, supported by County FAs have collectively undertaken initial club consultation and engagement to understand the potential facility mix and programme opportunity at WSG site. Initial club consultation has reached 40 community football clubs to date, totalling 823 grassroot teams.

2.10 This process has gathered a local picture of sport, physical activity, identifying that existing facilities are not sufficient to meet current and / or future projected demands from Wythenshawe communities.

2.11 Wythenshawe Sports Ground proposals have been developed to respond to local needs and aspirations for growth as set out in section 5.

3.0 APPLICATION DETAILS

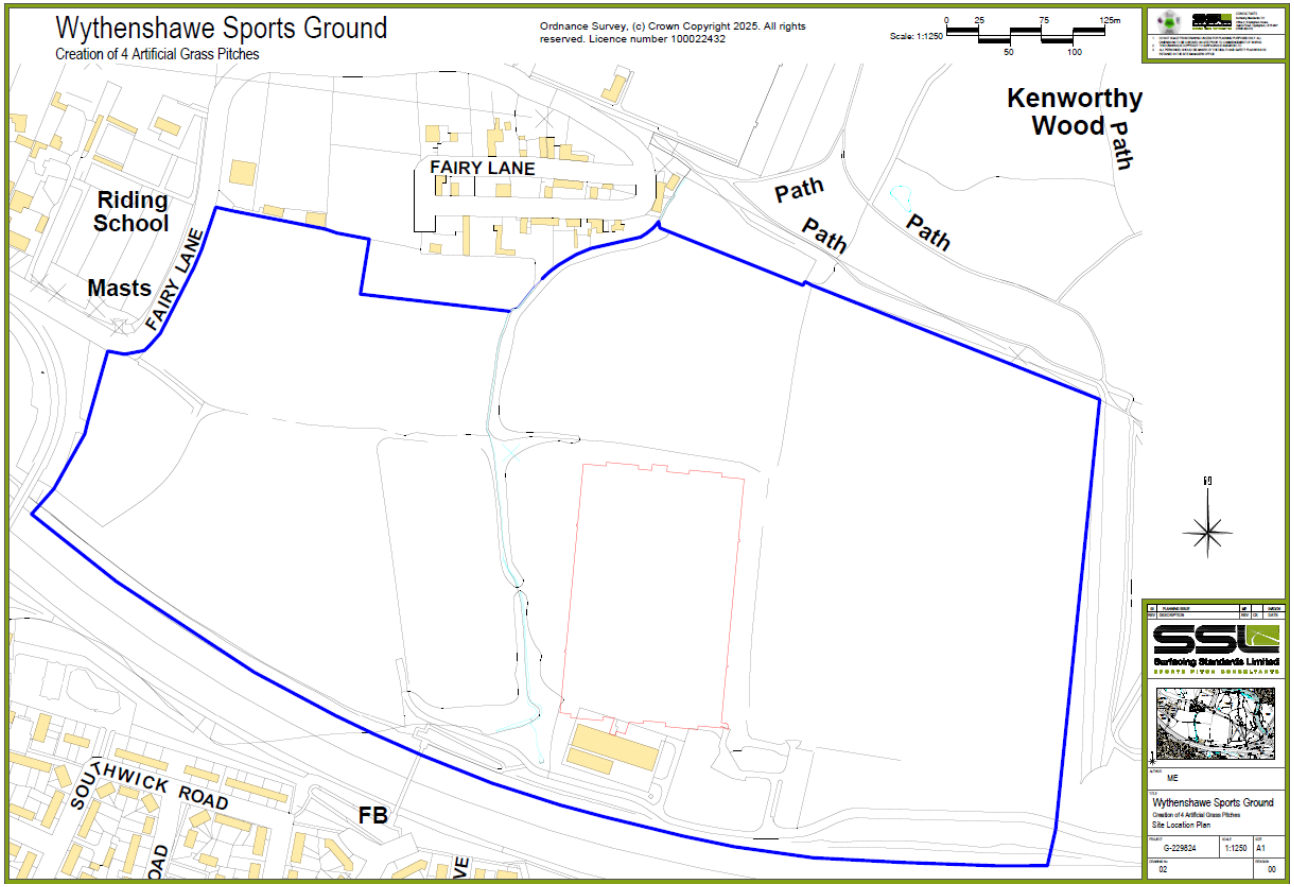
Development Location	**Wythenshawe Sports Ground, Willenhall Road, Manchester, M23 0BD**
Applicant	**Manchester City Council**
Proposal Description	▪ 4Nr. 97x61m AGPs with 3G artificial grass designed to accommodate a variety of youth ▪ football pitches and training areas. ▪ Macadam hardstanding viewing and goal storage areas. ▪ 4.5m high fencing to the perimeter of the facility with a 1.2m and 2.0m high internal ▪ fence. ▪ 18Nr. 15m high floodlighting columns. ▪ Maintenance / sports equipment store located within the fenced facility enclosure. ▪ Macadam access pathways. ▪ Football Foundation 'Huddle' catering cafe / unit

Application Site

3.1 Wythenshawe Sports Ground (WSG) covers 90 acres and provides equivalent to 27 full size senior football pitches, serviced by a large pavilion, maintenance shed and car park. Today the site delivers a significant community and university programme, including 160+ grassroot football and sports teams, Manchester University Football and Manchester Softball League.

3.2 The proposed development site comprises a large playing field located off Willenhall Road. The scheme proposes the construction of four artificial pitches within this field. The wider sports complex contains four additional surrounding playing field segments which serve both football and softball/baseball.

Map 1 – Proposed Location of Development



Map 2 – Proposed Sports Facility Configuration



Site Suitability

3.3 The application site forms part of the wider Wythenshawe Sports Ground, a long-established sporting area predominantly characterised by playing fields and associated recreational uses. The red line application boundary extends to approximately 5.1 hectares (51,000m²) and is situated within an existing sports and leisure setting, with surrounding land uses consistent with outdoor recreation and formal sports provision.

3.4 The site benefits from established vehicular access from Willenhall Road to the east, supported by an existing car park providing approximately 300 parking spaces, enabling the site to accommodate increased use associated with a multi-pitch football hub without the need for significant off-site highway works.

3.5 The site currently accommodates a purpose-built pavilion, maintenance buildings, and extensive playing fields. The proposals are focused on the refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing buildings, alongside the delivery of football infrastructure that is directly related to and supportive of the established sporting function of the site.

3.6 The development responds to identified football participation priorities within Manchester, including:

- Growth in women and girls' football
- Expansion of disability football provision
- Development of U18–21 pathways
- Retention and growth of adult and veterans' football

3.7 These objectives reinforce the appropriateness of the site for a football hub and demonstrate that the proposal represents an intensification and enhancement of an existing sports use, rather than the introduction of an unrelated or inappropriate activity.

3.8 The masterplan and building proposals have been developed with full regard to the physical characteristics and constraints of the site. The surrounding landscape is predominantly open playing fields, with mature tree belts and landscape features retained and integrated into the proposed layout. The configuration of pitches and pedestrian routes reflects existing tree lines and access points, ensuring the development sits comfortably within its setting.

3.9 The preferred design option prioritises:

- Reuse of the existing pavilion and maintenance buildings
- Minimal extension and alteration to the building footprint
- Efficient internal reconfiguration to meet Football Foundation standards

3.10 This approach reduces the visual and environmental impact of development and represents a proportionate response to the site context.

3.11 The site is well suited to accommodate inclusive and accessible sporting facilities. The proposals include:

- Redesigned vehicular and pedestrian access arrangements
- Dedicated accessible parking spaces
- A 2-metre widened pedestrian pathway to the north of the building to improve circulation and inclusive access for all users

3.12 These measures enhance the usability of the site for a wide range of user groups, including players, officials, spectators, and community users, and build on existing access infrastructure already established at the sports ground.

3.13 The site is also identified as being wholly within the Green Belt and partially within a Mineral Safeguarding Area for sand and gravel. However, the proposals are confined to the enhancement of existing buildings and established sports infrastructure, with no material expansion into undeveloped land. The development therefore maintains the openness and primary function of the Green Belt while delivering improved community sports facilities.

3.14 The phased construction strategy allows continued use of parts of the site during works and supports the ongoing operation of sports facilities, reinforcing the appropriateness of the location for redevelopment and enhancement rather than relocation of provision.

3.15 In summary, the application site is demonstrably suitable for the proposed football hub by virtue of:

- Its established and long-standing sporting use
- Existing access, parking, and supporting infrastructure
- Compatibility with surrounding land uses
- A design approach that prioritises refurbishment, accessibility, and landscape integration
- Alignment with strategic football participation priorities and community need

3.16 The proposals represent a logical, sustainable, and policy-aligned enhancement of an existing sports asset and confirm the site's appropriateness for the delivery of a multi-pitch football hub serving Wythenshawe and the wider Manchester area.

Current Facilities at the Sports Ground

3.18 Wythenshawe Sports Ground is an established multi-sport recreational complex located off Willenhall Road, Manchester. The site has a long-standing history as a

formal sports facility and currently accommodates a range of outdoor playing fields and supporting built infrastructure, serving both organised sport and wider community use.

3.19 Wythenshawe Sports Ground (WSG) is an established outdoor sports complex extending to approximately 90 acres, operating as a major community and university sports venue.

The site provides grass playing fields equivalent to 27 full-size senior football pitches, configured flexibly across the wider sports ground. The pitches support:

- Community football
- University football
- League-based match play

Football use is concentrated at weekends, with limited weekday use, reflecting capacity constraints of grass surfaces.

3.20 The site accommodates Manchester Softball League activity during the summer season, using grass pitches.

3.21 Existing Built Sports Facilities include:

- A large sports pavilion providing changing accommodation and ancillary facilities for pitch users.
- A maintenance shed supporting pitch operations.
- A substantial on-site car park, enabling the site to function as a multi-pitch sports venue.

3.22 The site presently accommodates over 160 grassroots football and sports teams, with broader consultation revealing 40 community football clubs representing a total of 823 grassroots teams; however, many of these teams cannot be fully hosted due to current capacity restrictions. As a result, the site is functioning at or near its maximum capacity, offering limited scope for further growth if reliant solely on grass pitches.

4.0 Project and Sporting Benefits

Project Benefits

4.1 The Wythenshawe Sports Ground Football Hub represents a strategic investment in community sports infrastructure, delivering long-term social, economic, cultural and operational benefits for Wythenshawe and the wider sub-regional area.

4.2 **Social value benefits** are central to the project. The hub will significantly increase access to year-round sport, addressing unmet demand and participation inequalities, particularly for women and girls, disabled people, ethnically diverse communities and lower socio-economic groups. By expanding capacity beyond the current constraints of grass pitches, the project will support existing teams, enable identified growth, and improve health, wellbeing and social cohesion through regular physical activity.

4.3 **Economic benefits** include the transition from an annually subsidised, high-risk site to a financially sustainable Football Hub. The project is forecast to generate long-term operating surpluses that will be ring-fenced for reinvestment into grassroots sport across Manchester, reducing future pressure on public finances. It also protects significant external investment and supports employment, skills development, volunteering and education pathways linked to sport and facility operations.

4.4 **Cultural and community benefits** arise from safeguarding Wythenshawe Sports Ground as a major community asset and reinforcing its role as a focal point for local identity and civic pride. The hub will support grassroots clubs, leagues and volunteers, while broadening cultural relevance through multi-sport provision including football, softball, weightlifting and other community activities, ensuring the site remains active and valued throughout the year.

4.5 **Operational benefits** include modernised facilities, resilient year-round pitches and a specialist management model delivered through the National Football Trust and Leisure United. This will improve reliability, reduce weather-related cancellations, enhance programming efficiency and align the site with national best practice and local strategic priorities.

4.6 Overall, the project delivers a sustainable, inclusive and resilient sports hub that secures the long-term future of Wythenshawe Sports Ground while maximising participation, value for money and community benefit.

Sporting Benefits

4.7 **Football Demand -** Wythenshawe Sports Ground (WSG) has been identified as a priority Football Hub site within the Football Foundation Football Hubs Investment Programme due to significant unmet demand for artificial grass pitch (AGP) provision across Wythenshawe and neighbouring conurbations, including Trafford and Stockport.

4.8 Key evidence of demand includes:

- Engagement with 40 community football clubs, representing 823 grassroots teams
- Baseline demand from 300+ teams, including:
    - 103 mini-soccer teams (including 9 female-only teams)
    - 169 youth male teams
    - 27 youth female teams
    - 11 adult male teams
    - 3 disability football teams
- Identification of demand for 53 additional new teams, which cannot currently be accommodated due to capacity constraints on existing grass and AGP facilities.

4.9 **Football Participation and Growth -** WSG currently operates at or near capacity, supporting 160+ grassroots football and sports teams on grass pitches, limiting opportunities for growth and year-round participation. The proposed Football Hub will:

- Deliver 4 full-size 11v11 3G Artificial Grass Pitches, enabling intensive, year-round use
- Significantly increase weekly participation capacity compared with grass pitches
- Support structured programming for:
    - Women and girls
    - Disabled players
    - Ethnically diverse communities
    - Lower socio-economic groups

4.10 The Football Hub model enables higher utilisation rates, reduced cancellations, and improved pitch quality, creating a sustainable platform for long-term football participation growth across Wythenshawe and adjacent areas.

4.11 **Other Sport Demand, Participation and Growth -** In addition to football, WSG currently accommodates and will continue to support a range of other sports and physical activities. Existing and identified demand includes:

- Manchester Softball League, operating a summer league programme on grass pitches
- Running groups and informal recreational activity
- Weightlifting and strength & conditioning activity, with:
    - Identified demand for 900–1,000 annual gym members and users
    - Opportunity to establish a regional talent centre for weightlifting, supporting performance pathways.

4.12 Further stakeholder engagement has identified interest from Lancashire GAA, seeking a central hub to support junior development, women and girls teams, and county programmes.

4.13 The Football Hub will provide opportunities for multi-sport use outside of the football season, maximising utilisation of pitches and ancillary facilities.

4.14 The site has a long-standing role in supporting university and educational sport, including

- Ongoing use by Manchester University Football programmes
- Identified opportunity to deliver:
    - BTEC and Football Academy programmes from year one of operation
    - Workforce development, coaching, and volunteering pathways linked to partner clubs on site

The Football Hub model supports structured daytime use by educational partners, complementing evening and weekend community activity and strengthening pathways from education into community sport.

Summary Position

4.15 In summary, the Wythenshawe Sports Ground Football Hub will:

- Address significant unmet football demand across Manchester, Trafford and Stockport
- Enable growth beyond the current **160**+ teams already using the site
- Provide capacity for 300+ existing teams and 53 identified new teams
- Deliver year-round, inclusive football participation through 4 full-size 3G AGPs
- Support expansion of women's, girls', disability and inclusive football
- Strengthen multi-sport provision, including softball, running, and weightlifting
- Provide educational pathways through academies and vocational programmes
- Establish a sustainable operating model generating reinvestment into grassroots sport

Collectively, these benefits demonstrate that the proposal represents a **s**trategic enhancement of sports provision, delivering long-term participation, health, education and community outcomes for Wythenshawe and the wider sub-regional area.

5.0 LINKS TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL STRATEGIES

Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (2022)

5.1 In December 2017, the council adopted Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy (2017-2021) which set out the framework for investment into playing pitch and outdoor facility improvements. The updated Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy 2022-2031 (PPOSS) builds upon the preceding strategy and provides the evidence to help inform planning, investment, and sport development initiatives.

5.2 Since 2022 Annual Monitoring Reports have been prepared which tracks the change in teams and pitches across each season. The 2024 Annual Monitoring Report shows there was a 9% increase in the number of football teams across Manchester since 2023, which compares to a 10% increase between 2022/23. Wythenshawe has experienced the largest increase of teams from 151 to 206 (36%).

Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (2022)

5.3 The Wythenshawe Football Hub provides a clear, place-based mechanism for delivering the ambitions of the Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, translating city-wide objectives into tangible neighbourhood outcomes.

5.4 The Strategy's core aim of encouraging residents to move more is supported through the provision of accessible, affordable and year-round football and physical activity opportunities in an area with known health and participation inequalities. By replacing weather-constrained grass pitches with reliable 3G facilities, the Hub removes barriers such as cancellations, limited availability and inconsistent quality, enabling regular participation for people who are least active.

5.5 The Hub directly supports the Strategy's focus on positive experiences for children and young people by providing a safe, inclusive and high-quality environment for grassroots sport. It strengthens pathways from informal participation into club football, education and training opportunities, helping to embed physical literacy, improve wellbeing and support long-term engagement from an early age.

5.6 In line with the Strategy's objective to increase and sustain adult participation, the Hub enables flexible formats such as recreational, veterans' and walking football, alongside informal and fitness-based activity. The consistency of provision supports adults to maintain active habits throughout different life stages, contributing to improved physical and mental health outcomes.

5.7 The Wythenshawe Football Hub exemplifies the Strategy's commitment to creating active places and neighbourhoods. Investment is focused on enhancing an existing strategic sports asset, improving accessibility, inclusivity and quality while

reducing spatial inequalities in provision. The Hub acts as a focal point for community activity, partnership working and local engagement.

5.8 The project also contributes to wider strategic objectives by supporting workforce development, volunteering and education pathways linked to sport, and by aligning with the Strategy's ambition to move towards a more sustainable, low-carbon leisure estate through modernised facilities and promotion of active lifestyles.

5.9 Overall, the Wythenshawe Football Hub represents a practical and deliverable implementation of the Manchester Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, supporting healthier, more active communities while securing the long-term sustainability of a key neighbourhood sports asset.

Manchester Local Football Facility Plan (2023)

5.10 Every local authority area in the Country has a Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) to enable investment in football facilities to be accurately targeted. Facility investment is not static and the plans are periodically updated to reflect changes and to ensure the right projects are prioritised. The national funding partners have significantly increased investment to accelerate efforts to deliver more and better football facilities for the grassroots game. The purpose of this plan is to identify the priority projects for potential investment in this area.

5.11 The priority projects for potential investment identified in the LFFP will help develop a sustainable network of quality facilities to drive participation across all parts of the game. Central to this are five key success factors: quality, inclusivity, sustainability, engagement and usage. Each identified project takes account of these factors.

5.12 The Manchester Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) has recognised Wythenshawe Sports Ground as a key priority for investment, specifically focusing on the enhancement of grass pitches, the addition of supporting ancillary facilities, and the development of artificial grass pitches (AGPs). During the most recent review of the LFFP, Wythenshawe Sports Ground was not initially designated as the central location to accommodate anticipated growth in participation. However, following consultation with the Football Foundation (FF) and Manchester FA, Wythenshawe Sports Ground emerged as the preferred site to fulfil these strategic aims and respond to future demand.

6.0 PLANNING POLICY

Sport England Playing Fields Policy and Guidance (Updated 2021)

6.1 Sport England will be a statutory consultee on this planning application as the proposal affects a playing field. The following details are provided to enable Sport England's informed assessment of whether the proposed new sports facilities, reconfiguration of some of the existing sports facilities, and construction of a pavilion, provides 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 to satisfy Exception E5 of Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and Guidance.

6.2 Policy Exception E5 requires the proposed development for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, to be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field or playing fields'. The statement defines in planning terms what is considered a 'playing field', which is; the whole of a site that encompasses at least one playing pitch. A playing pitch is a delineated area, which together with any run off is of 0.2 hectares or more. Playing pitches may have a grass surface or an artificial one. The aim of the policy is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of quality pitches to satisfy the current and estimated future demands of the pitch sports.

6.3 The proposal includes the provision of ancillary facilities to support the sports hub. These facilities include a Huddle Catering Unit. It is anticipated this facility will meet Sport England Playing Fields Policy Exception E2 which states: "*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.*"

National Planning Policy Framework (Updated 2024)

6.4 The planning system encourages and promotes the retention of existing and the provision of additional, outdoor sports facilities, both public and private. Specifically, paragraph 104 (concerning open space, sport and recreation) of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:

"Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings, or land to be surplus to requirements; or
b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or

c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use."

6.5 As the proposal involves the loss of natural turf playing field to another sport, evidence to justify the proposals compliance against NPPF paragraph 104(c)is provided in this statement.

Also, NPPF paragraph 103 recommends that:

"Access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision."

6.6 Manchester Playing Pitch Strategy (2022-2031) is the relevant Needs Assessment, as referenced in paragraph 103 of the NPPF, and this has been used to help inform the requirements at Wythenshawe Park Sports Hub.

Manchester Core Strategy

6.7 Core Strategy policy EN10 (Safeguarding Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities) reflects the objectives of the NPPF and Sport England Playing Fields Policy at a local level. The policy seeks to protect and enhance existing open space, sport and recreation facilities and contains a clause that "The development will be ancillary to the open space, sport or recreation facility and complement the use or character."

Places for Everyone – Greater Manchester Joint Development Plan (2024)

6.8 Places for Everyone is the Joint Development Plan for Greater Manchester and was adopted by Manchester City Council March 2024. Places for Everyone is one of a suite of documents that forms Manchester's Local Development Plan. The policy of relevance to sport and recreation is JP-P7 which seeks to create "A network of high quality and accessible sports and recreation facilities will be protected and enhanced, supporting greater levels of activity for all ages," and "The provision of sports facilities will be determined by individual local authorities through an evidence based approach".

7.0 LOCAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

7.1 Community and stakeholder engagement has been a central component in shaping the Wythenshawe Sports Ground Football Hub proposals, ensuring that the scheme responds directly to evidenced local need, aligns with national governing body (NGB) requirements, and delivers meaningful community benefit. Engagement has been undertaken to:

- Understand existing and future demand for football and multi-sport provision
- Test the suitability of Wythenshawe Sports Ground as a Football Hub location
- Inform the facility mix, scale, and operational model
- Ensure compliance with Sport England Playing Fields Policy and the NPPF through robust evidence
- Align proposals with local health, inclusion and inequality priorities

7.2 This engagement has been iterative, taking place alongside feasibility, business case development and design progression, and has involved both strategic stakeholders and local community partners.

7.3 At a strategic level, the project has been shaped through close engagement with:

- Football Foundation (FF) – identifying Wythenshawe Sports Ground as a priority Football Hub site within the national Football Hubs Investment Programme
- County Football Associations (Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire) – providing affiliated data, demand analysis and growth projections
- Local Authorities (Manchester City Council, Trafford Council and Stockport Council) – coordinating cross-boundary demand and agreeing strategic investment priorities through the Football Consortium

7.4 This engagement confirmed a significant and worsening shortfall in 3G Artificial Grass Pitch (AGP) provision across Manchester and neighbouring authorities, with Wythenshawe identified as a key location to address unmet demand. The proposals were therefore developed to align with the Manchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy and the Manchester Local Football Facility Plan.

7.5 Extensive consultation has been undertaken with organised sport, including:

- Engagement with 40 community football clubs, representing 823 grassroots teams, to understand current usage, constraints and future growth aspirations
- Identification of baseline demand from 300+ teams, alongside latent demand for 53 additional teams that cannot currently be accommodated due to capacity constraints
- Consultation with leagues including the South Manchester Girls League, Manchester Respect League and Timperley & District Junior League, all of which reported operating at capacity with significant unmet demand

7.6 This engagement directly informed the scale of provision proposed (four full-size 3G AGPs) and the focus on inclusive programming for women and girls, disability football and youth development pathways.

7.7 Beyond formal sport, engagement has been undertaken to ensure the hub responds to broader community needs. Over the preceding 12-month period, Manchester Active led engagement with:

- 120 community partners across 44 engagement events, including workshops, face-to-face meetings, online meetings and written communication
- Stakeholders including housing providers, GPs, neighbourhood health teams, care navigation services, physical activity providers, mental health workers, council services and local councillors

7.8 This process provided a detailed local picture of sport, physical activity and health-based service needs in Wythenshawe, identifying that existing facilities are insufficient to meet current and future demand and that year-round, accessible provision is critical in addressing participation and health inequalities.

7.9 The project has also been informed by engagement with non-football sports and activity providers, including:

- Manchester Softball League, which currently uses the site seasonally
- Weightlifting stakeholders, with identified demand for 900–1,000 annual gym users and the opportunity to establish a regional talent centre
- Emerging interest from Lancashire GAA for junior, women and girls, and county programme delivery

7.10 This consultation ensured that the Football Hub proposals support a genuinely multi-sport model, maximising year-round use and reinforcing the role of Wythenshawe Sports Ground as a strategic community sports asset.

7.11 The outcomes of consultation have directly shaped the final scheme by:

- Confirming the need for four full-size 3G AGPs to address capacity shortfalls
- Prioritising inclusive access for women and girls, disabled players, ethnically diverse communities and lower socio-economic groups
- Supporting the retention and enhancement of multi-sport provision alongside football
- Informing the future Community Use Agreement, to be developed with NGBs and clubs and overseen by a Local Advisory Board

7.12 The establishment of a Local Advisory Board, with representation from Manchester City Council, Manchester Active, the Football Foundation, County FA, Premier League Foundations and community partners, provides an ongoing mechanism for stakeholder involvement in governance and operation.

7.13 In summary, the Wythenshawe Sports Ground Football Hub has been informed by comprehensive, multi-layered engagement spanning national funding bodies,

governing organisations, local authorities, clubs, leagues, health partners and the wider community. This process has ensured that the proposals are evidence-led, policy-compliant and firmly rooted in local need, delivering a sustainable and inclusive sports hub that responds to both current demand and long-term growth aspirations.

8.0 Current and Proposed Site Usage

8.1 The existing use of Wythenshawe Sports Ground supports organised football, baseball and weightlifting activity, with football operating at or near capacity due to reliance on natural turf pitches that are subject to seasonal and weather-related constraints. Current grass provision limits intensity of use, restricts midweek activity and constrains the ability of existing clubs to grow or accommodate additional teams, resulting in unmet demand identified through consultation.

8.2 The proposed development enables a significant enhancement to sporting provision through the introduction of four full-size 3G Artificial Grass Pitches and expanded ancillary facilities. This represents a qualitative and quantitative improvement in sports infrastructure, enabling substantially higher levels of participation, more reliable year-round access and increased intensity of use compared with the existing grass-based layout.

8.3 Football remains the primary beneficiary of the proposals, with the number of clubs retained but team capacity increasing by 121%. This growth is enabled by the superior carrying capacity of 3G pitches, which allow intensive training and match play without the degradation or cancellation issues associated with grass surfaces. The proposals therefore deliver a material net gain to football participation that could not be achieved within the existing site configuration.

8.4 Weightlifting provision is also significantly enhanced, with participation projected to increase by 170% through the expansion and improvement of dedicated facilities. This supports increased community access, more intensive programming and alignment with identified local demand for health, fitness and strength-based activity.

8.5 By contrast, softball provision is retained at existing levels, with no forecast growth, reflecting that current provision is sufficient to meet demand and that the proposals seek to safeguard rather than displace this activity. This ensures continuity of existing sport while directing investment to those uses where capacity deficits and growth potential are clearly evidenced.

8.6 Taken together, the proposals deliver a substantial net benefit to sport through increased participation, enhanced quality of facilities, year-round usability and improved operational resilience. These benefits clearly outweigh any loss or prejudice to the playing field, fully satisfying the requirements of Sport England Playing Fields Policy Exception E5.

Exception E5 – Supporting Evidence Table

Sport	Current number of clubs	Current teams / members	Proposed number of clubs	Proposed teams / members	% Growth
Football	6	79	6	175	121%
Softball	1	5	1	5	0%
Weightlifting	N/A	146	N/A	400	170%

Ancillary Provision

8.7 Sport England Playing Fields Policy Exception E2 allows for development where *"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."*

8.8 The proposed Huddle catering unit at Wythenshawe Sports Ground meets the requirements of Exception E2 for the following reasons:

- The Huddle unit is expressly identified as an ancillary facility intended to support the primary use of the site as a football hub. Its function is limited to providing refreshments and informal social space for players, officials, volunteers and spectators associated with sporting activity on the 3G pitches. It does not operate as a standalone commercial use and has no independent planning purpose separate from the sporting function of the site.
- The Huddle catering unit does not result in the loss of any playing pitch, nor does it reduce the size, availability or quality of the existing or proposed sports surfaces. The Playing Field Statement confirms that the unit is accommodated as part of the wider sports hub infrastructure and does not prejudice the ability of the site to function as a playing field.
- The provision of on-site catering supports the effective operation of a multi-pitch football hub by improving user experience, enabling longer dwell times and supporting tournament, league and community use. This type of facility is typical of Football Foundation hub models and is integral to the sustainable and inclusive operation of the playing field rather than detracting from it.

8.9 As the Huddle catering unit is ancillary and supports the principal sporting use of the site as a playing field, and does not affect the quantity or quality of playing pitches, it fully satisfies the criteria of Sport England Playing Fields Policy Exception E2. The development therefore accords with national planning policy for playing

fields and represents an appropriate supporting facility within an established sports hub.

8.10 As previously stated, a separate planning application (144600/VO/2025) was approved 16th January 2026 for the reconfiguration of the existing pavilion. The combination of the pavilion and Huddle Catering Unit will support the principal function of the site as a playing field.

Community Use, Management and Maintenance

8.11 Manchester Active will prepare a Community Use Agreement (CUA) in partnership with the NGBs and local sports clubs to ensure the site is properly activated and mobilised. The CUA will be prepared in accordance with Sport England's guidance on preparing CUA's. The CUA will be managed via a Local Advisory Board Group who will also monitor the success of the operations and delivery of project outputs. The Board will include representation from MCC, Manchester Active, Premier League Sport Foundations (MU Foundation and City in the Community), The FF, County Football Association, Trafford Council, and any wider Key Stakeholder / Community Partner Organisations.

8.12 The long-term management and operational responsibility for Wythenshawe Sports Ground Football Hub will sit with Leisure United, operating under a charitable Football Hub model via the National Football Trust (NFT). Leisure United is identified as the designated Football Hub operator responsible for the day-to-day operation, programming and management of the facilities once development is complete.

8.13 This operating model is designed to ring-fence operational risk from the local authority while ensuring that the site is managed in accordance with Football Foundation standards and national best practice for Football Hubs. Any operational surpluses generated are to be reinvested into grassroots sport, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of the site.

8.14 Maintenance and upkeep of the facilities will also be the responsibility of Leisure United, covering both the new 3G Artificial Grass Pitches and associated ancillary facilities. This includes routine and lifecycle maintenance required to ensure that facilities remain compliant with Football Foundation and National Governing Body requirements.

8.15 The allocation of maintenance responsibility to the operator ensures that the facilities are maintained to a standard appropriate for intensive, year-round use and protects the long-term playing capacity and quality of the site.

8.16 A Local Advisory Board Group will be established to monitor the success of the Football Hub's operation and the delivery of agreed outputs. The Advisory Board provides a formal mechanism for stakeholder input, performance monitoring and community accountability, but does not undertake day-to-day management or

maintenance, which remains with Leisure United. This group will include representation from:

- Manchester City Council
- Manchester Active
- The Football Foundation / National Football Trust
- County Football Associations
- Premier League Club Foundations (including MU Foundation and City in the Community)
- Trafford Council and other relevant community partners

Conclusion

8.17 Based on the above justification, we consider the proposals would give rise to a considerable benefit to the wider community through the provision of an enhanced playing facility. Given the above details, we believe the proposed development meets the requirements of Sport England Policy Exception E5 – The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport and physical activity, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport and physical activity as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field; and paragraph 99(c) of the NPPF.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Having explained and proven the merits of this proposal in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Sport England Playing Fields Policy and Manchester's Local Development Plan policies including relevant material planning considerations, we request this proposal is accepted for the following reasons:

- The proposal would deliver an enhanced sports facility, with better quality facilities, in a suitable location.
- The proposal would give rise to a considerable benefit to the wider community through the provision of an enhanced sports facility and the opportunity for usage throughout the year, in accordance with Section 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities (open space and recreation) of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).
- The proposal provides adequate on-site parking and necessary traffic management to meet the needs of the development and would not result in any harm to the safety of the surrounding public highway network.
- The proposal will complement the Playing Field surroundings and will not appear inappropriate to any view looking into the site, in accordance with Section 12 – Achieving well-designed places of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).
- The proposal would ensure that surface water run-off is effectively managed and does not increase flood risk elsewhere, in accordance with Section 14 – Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).
- The proposal would ensure that performance of the proposed artificial lighting (floodlighting) system complies with an Environmental Zone E2 (ILP), in accordance with Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).
- The proposal would not result in an unacceptable impact to any residential amenity or have a detrimental impact on the private amenity of the residents due to excessive impacts from noise, in accordance with Section 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).
- Equally, the proposal satisfies relevant sections of Manchester City Council planning policies.
- The proposal satisfies Sport England's Exceptions to policy E2 and E5 – The proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor facility for sport and physical activity, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport and physical activity as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss, or prejudice to the use, of the area of playing field.

- The sports facilities will be designed and constructed to a quality and standard that meets NGB requirements.