Planning Guidance

Assessing planning applications affecting existing playing fields

[Consultation Draft – November 2026]

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This draft guidance draws on the content of our current Playing Fields Policy and Guidance document, where its policy exceptions are relevant to Policy HC7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Government, in the August 2026 version of the NPPF, introduced the new criterion HC7 (1c) to its policy on the protection of recreational facilities. We have drafted initial guidance for areas we believe should be considered when assessing relevant applications against this new criterion.

This draft guidance forms part of a wider consultation on changes to our approach to assessing planning applications affecting playing fields, including retiring our current Playing Fields Policy and Guidance document. We would welcome any feedback on this draft guidance by Friday 18th December via the online response form which can be accessed on the wider consultation page (link below).

Link: Consultation page and online response form

Please provide feedback on the current draft content along with any suggestions for additional content that would help with making the final guidance a valuable resource. If you cannot respond via the online form, please send your response by email to: planningforsport@sportengland.org

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1. Purpose of the guidance and who is it for

1.1 The purpose of the guidance is to assist decision makers with assessing planning applications for development affecting existing playing fields. While the focus is on assessing such applications against Policy HC7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the guidance also highlights other relevant NPPF policies. Following the guidance will help to ensure timely, well-informed decisions on applications based on a robust assessment of the impacts on playing fields and recognition of their value to sport and local communities (see our Playing Fields Statement).

1.2 The guidance, which will be kept under review and updated as appropriate, has been developed to assist:

- Local Planning Authorities with determining applications.
- the Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State with determining planning appeals.
- Sport England responding to consultations on planning applications affecting playing fields.

It will also be a useful resource for:

- Developers and other applicants preparing and submitting applications.
- Local communities and sports organisations commenting on applications.
- Local Planning Authorities developing planning policy, including site allocations.

1.3 The guidance covers sporting considerations in relation to playing fields. It does not cover other sport and recreational facilities to which Policy HC7 should be applied or non-sporting issues. The decision maker, e.g., the local planning authority, should also carefully consider non-sporting issues such as the landscape value of a playing field, its contribution to the openness of an area and its use for other community activities.

2. Supporting resources

2.1 We intend to develop advice notes which will support this guidance. The advice notes will provide specific details and case studies to help with assessing and preparing applications for certain facility types and development issues affecting playing fields (see Annex B).

2.2 A range of other useful resources are available on the Sport England website, including a suite of model planning conditions. These resources are referred to within the relevant sections of this guidance, with a full list provided in Annex B.

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3. Policies applications should be assessed against

3.1 Planning law requires that applications be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise. National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs) within the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are material considerations, and the NPPF states that:

"*All plan-makers should, in preparing plans (c) Not include policies which duplicate, substantively restate or are inconsistent with content of national decision-making policies, unless directed by other policies in the Framework*" (NPPF Policy PM6).

"*Development plan policies (or parts of those policies) which are materially inconsistent with national decision-making policies in this Framework should be given very little weight*" (NPPF Annex A: Implementation).

3.2 Applications affecting playing fields should therefore be assessed against the relevant NDMPs. The principal NDMP regarding existing playing fields is Policy *HC7 'Development affecting existing recreation facilities'* and is the focus of this guidance. If a development proposal would have a substantial adverse impact in relation to the application of Policy HC7, then NPPF Policy S4 '*Principle of development within settlements*' would also be relevant. For clarity, as the NPPF makes clear, applications affecting existing playing fields should be assessed against Policy HC7 and not against the broader NPPF Policy HC6, '*Retention of key community facilities and public service infrastructure*'.

3.3 Where a proposed development would not result in the direct loss of an area of playing field, covered under Policy HC7, but may affect its use, e.g., development adjacent to a playing field at risk from ball strike, the application should be assessed against NPPF Policy P4 '*Impact of development on existing activities*'. Policy P4 requires new development to identify impacts on existing community facilities, including sports clubs, and provide suitable mitigation so their established operations are not unreasonably restricted as a result of new development being approved.

3.4 The Government, as indicated in their August 2026 response to the consultation on the NPPF, will be publishing updated guidance to ensure Policy P4 is applied effectively and consistently. Along with looking to assist the Government with the development of this guidance, Sport England intends to publish an advice note to support the implementation of Policy P4 in relation to playing fields.

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4. Policy HC7 of the National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 Policy HC7 '*Development affecting existing recreation facilities*' states:

1. *Development proposals should not result in the loss of existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, other formal and informal play space and allotments, 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 location which offers comparable or improved accessibility for the community it serves; or*
    c. *The development is for public service infrastructure, and the resulting loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and/or quality; or*
    d. *The development is for alternative open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

4.2 Paragraphs 5.1 to 8.11 provide guidance on assessing applications against each of the individual Policy HC7 criteria.

4.3 Policy HC7 should be applied consistently to all existing playing fields regardless of:

- ownership (e.g. public or private).
- the nature and level of use.
- when a playing field was last used.
- current management and accessibility arrangements.

4.4 The lack of use of a playing field or part of a playing field, should not be taken as necessarily indicating an absence of need in an area. There are several reasons why a playing field may be underused or not in use, and such land can retain the potential to meet the current and future sporting needs of local communities.

4.5 Along with applications affecting existing playing fields, any applications affecting land allocated as a playing field in a development plan, or in proposals for such a plan or its alteration or replacement should also be assessed against Policy HC7. The below guidance for the HC7 criteria should therefore also be used to help assess such applications. For example, for HC7 (1a), a robust assessment would need to clearly show the allocation is now surplus to requirements.

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5. Guidance for assessing applications against Policy HC7 (1a)

***HC7 (1a)**: An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements.*

Has the application included sufficient information?

5.1 To enable the application to be assessed efficiently it should provide information in line with the suggested requirements in Annex C.

Has a robust and up-to-date assessment been undertaken?

5.2 The application should refer to an up-to-date assessment developed and adopted by the relevant local authority (e.g. as included in a local authority wide playing pitch strategy) or undertaken by the applicant. If a local authority assessment is referred to, it should have taken into account cross-boundary demand. This is especially important where an application site is near another authority and/or serves a cross local authority boundary catchment.

5.3 Any assessment should follow a recommended approach e.g. as set out in Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy guidance (referred to in the Government's NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance), or an alternative methodology acceptable to Sport England. As a guide, if a local authority playing pitch strategy (PPS) has not been reviewed and subsequently updated within three years of the PPS being signed off by the steering group, then Sport England and pitch sport NGBs would consider the PPS and the information on which it is based to be out of date. The nature of the supply and in particular the demand for playing pitches in the area will likely to have changed over the three years. Therefore, without any form of review and update within this time period it would be difficult to make the case that the supply and demand information and assessment is sufficiently robust.

5.4 Any assessment undertaken by an applicant should be based on up-to-date information and its geographical extent should reflect site's catchment (see paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8) and the scale and coverage of the supply of, and demand for, playing pitches in the area.

5.5 All assessments should provide a robust and carefully documented assessment of the supply of, and current and future demand for, playing pitches in the catchment area, considering the quantity, quality, accessibility and availability of provision. In judging whether an assessment is robust and has clearly shown an area of playing field to be surplus to requirements all four elements need careful consideration. For example, there may be circumstances where an acceptable assessment has demonstrated that there is an overall excess of playing field

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provision in the area in terms of quantity and availability, which will be maintained after the proposed development, but deficiencies exist in the quality and/or accessibility of playing pitches, which may be exacerbated by any proposed loss of an area of playing field. In such circumstances, it may be appropriate to require improvements to the quality and/or accessibility of appropriate pitches before it can be determined that any area of playing field is surplus to requirements. In such circumstances a financial contribution could be secured through a legal agreement for qualitative and/or access improvements, reflecting priorities identified in the assessment (e.g. within the local authority's playing pitch strategy).

5.6 Use of school plans and assessments for the purposes of Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 or Schedule 1 of the Academies Act 2010 (or their replacements), and the Department for Education's advice on the disposal or change of use of playing field and school land, are not appropriate. These assessments only cover the needs of the school, nearby schools and existing community users of the site. They do not assess the wider local and strategic sporting need for playing fields.

How has the applicant determined the geographical extent of any assessment?

5.7 Any assessment undertaken by the applicant should ensure its geographical extent has been informed by the site's catchment, rather than by a simple geographical measure and/or local authority boundaries.

5.8 The extent of the catchment should be informed by:

- Where individuals and/or teams who would find the site convenient are located.
- the nature and quality of pitches which are, or might realistically be, provided on the playing field.
- the sports, age groups and level and extent of play the site currently and could reasonably accommodate; and,
- any distinctive site qualities. For example, the only playing field in an area capable of accommodating a pitch for a particular sport or of sufficient quality to provide for a particular level of play, would have a much greater catchment than one used for pitches and of a quality which could also be found in many other places.

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Does the assessment consider whether the site is of special significance for sport?

5.9 If a playing field is of particular importance to sport, it is unlikely to be able to be deemed surplus to requirements. This may be the case for example if:

- it is of exceptional quality.
- it is of historic value to one of more sports.
- it is particularly important to the development of one or more sports and to one or more sport national governing body; and,
- it meets a specific national, regional or local need or requirement which cannot be easily replicated.

6. Guidance for assessing applications against Policy HC7 (1b)

***HC7 (1b)**: The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, in a location which offers comparable or improved accessibility for the community it serves.*

Has the application included sufficient information?

6.1 To enable the application to be assessed efficiently it should provide information in line with the suggested requirements in Annex C.

Will equivalent or better quantity be provided?

6.2 To assess whether equivalent or better quantity will be provided, a comparison should be undertaken in square metres between the area of playing field proposed to be lost and the proposed replacement area. The shape of both areas should also be considered alongside other qualitative considerations (see paragraph 6.6).

Will equivalent or better quality be provided?

6.3 Any replacement area of playing field should:

- be laid out, drained, maintained and provided with the necessary ancillary facilities so as to have the equivalent or better capability, functionality and flexibility as the existing area of playing field to accommodate playing pitches, matches, training sessions and other sporting activities.
- be capable of providing playing pitches and producing playing characteristics, supported by all necessary ancillary facilities to the relevant standards, to allow the same level of competitive play to take place without requiring any additional maintenance input. If additional maintenance

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input is required, then any additional costs for this should be met by the applicant.

For example, if a playing field includes a pitch used by a senior county league club, then to achieve the equivalent quality the replacement playing field must be capable of providing for this standard of play without any additional costs being incurred by users, when compared to use of the existing site. This applies equally to the provision of ancillary facilities, such as changing rooms, car parking, fencing and artificial sports lighting.

6.4 To demonstrate that equivalent or better quality will be provided, the application should include:

- an assessment of the performance of the existing area of playing field.
- a programme of works (including pitch construction) for the creation of the replacement area of playing field (to ensure it is developed to the required quality).
- a management and monitoring plan.

These details should have been undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced sports turf consultant.

6.5 Any replacement area of playing field and ancillary facilities should satisfy relevant Sport England design guidance and that of the relevant national governing bodies of sport. Sport England advocates the use of Part C 'Equivalent Quality Assessment' of its 'Natural Turf for Sport' guidance document, to help demonstrate whether equivalent or better quality can be achieved, especially where the replacement area of playing field is proposed to occupy the footprint of former buildings, as often occurs with school redevelopments.

6.6 The shape of any replacement area of playing field should be able to provide an equivalent or better layout to accommodate playing pitches and other sporting activities. For example, replacing a regularly shaped playing field with a larger but irregularly shaped area may not be acceptable if its shape restricts the layout. Conversely, providing a smaller but more regularly shaped replacement for an existing irregularly shaped playing field may be acceptable if it can accommodate an equivalent or better layout.

Will replacement playing field be made available for use prior to any loss?

6.7 Delivery of any replacement area of playing field should be secured through a legal agreement between the applicant and the local planning authority, or by way of a negatively worded condition attached to a planning permission (often referred to as a Grampian-style condition).

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6.8 Any replacement area of playing field and associated facilities should be available for use prior to the implementation of any development affecting the existing area of playing field, or the loss of any sporting use of the existing area of playing field, in order to secure continuity of use and certainty of re-provision. Where exceptional circumstances such as site constraints prevent such advance replacement (e.g. in educational renewal and rationalisation programmes), a reasonable alternative timescale should be secured for delivering the replacement provision. Where an alternative timescale is justified, all reasonable steps should be taken by the applicant to secure transitional arrangements for, and which are acceptable to, the displaced users to enable continuity of sporting activity.

Will replacement playing field provide comparable or improved accessibility?

6.9 Any replacement area of playing field should provide the community served by the existing area of playing field with comparable or improved accessibility, in terms of both location and management arrangements.

6.10 A suitable location is a place to which current and former regular users of a playing field, and those who may want to use the playing field now or in the future, can conveniently gain access by appropriate travel modes. The location of playing fields relative to those who use them, or who may wish to do so, is an important consideration in determining whether there is sufficient supply. A simple geographical measure or spread of facilities are not appropriate tests to apply in this context. For example, it is more important to understand how convenient the location of a playing field is for its regular users (e.g. 'home' sports teams or schools). This can vary, for example if the users are predominantly juniors, or associated with an organisation with nearby headquarters, then only a playing field very close by is likely to be in a suitable location. To the members of a major sports club, who travel from a wider area, a change of location of a greater distance may be acceptable.

6.11 What is considered to be a suitable location in relation to the sporting use of a playing field should be assessed on a case-by-case basis considering:

- access by public transport and active travel modes such as cycling, wheeling and walking.
- convenience for current, appropriate former, and potential users.
- user's competitive play, training and practice needs.

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Will equivalent or better management arrangements be provided?

6.12 Equivalent or better management arrangements should be required to minimise any detrimental impact in terms of accessibility for the community served by the current area of playing field. For example, if an existing area of playing field is available to the local community and managed through a formal community use agreement, then an agreement securing equivalent or better community access and use of any replacement area of playing field should be put in place.

6.13 Management arrangements should cover all aspects that govern the running of a playing field and affect accessibility to the community, including:

- ownership arrangements.
- rental and maintenance costs.
- management charges.
- opening hours and community access.
- staffing levels.
- any restrictive covenants.
- revenue generating activities that support the running of a playing field such as clubhouse social facilities, bars, catering and advertising.

Will the replacement provide a new area of playing field?

6.14 Proposals to intensify or increase the use of an area of an existing playing field on the application site or off site, including marking out playing pitches on areas of a playing field not currently marked out for playing pitches, would be unlikely to meet the requirements of HC7 (1b). This is because it does not provide a new area of playing field (quantity) and may also cause deterioration in the quality of existing playing fields.

Do the proposals include replacing an area of natural grass playing field with an artificial surface in a different location?

6.15 Such proposals could meet policy HC7 (1b) if the new location is not on an existing playing field, and the sporting benefits of the artificial surface outweigh any detriment to sport from the loss of the natural grass surface. The potential benefits and detriment to sport of such a proposal should be considered in line with the guidance provided below under HC7 (1d).

6.16 A proposal for a new artificial grass pitch on an existing playing field which forms part of, or is capable of forming part of, a playing pitch would not meet with HC7 (1b) and would need to be assessed under HC7 (1d).

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7. Guidance for assessing applications against Policy HC7 (1c)

***HC7 (1c)**: The development is for public service infrastructure, and the resulting loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and/or quality.*

To what extent does HC7 (1c) apply to the application?

7.1 HC7 (1c) only applies to applications for public service infrastructure, defined in the Glossary to the NPPF by the closed list of '*Education and healthcare facilities of all types, and facilities for blue light, social care, library and criminal justice uses*'.

7.2 For mixed-use schemes, HC7 (1c) should only be applied to any loss of playing field resulting from proposed public service infrastructure. Any loss that may result from other proposed uses within a mixed-use scheme need to be assessed against the remaining HC7 criteria.

Has the application included sufficient information?

7.3 To enable the application to be assessed efficiently it should provide information in line with the suggested requirements in Annex C.

Are there robust planning reasons why an application is not proposing replacement provision which is equivalent or better in terms of quantity and quality?

7.4 HC7 (1c) is more permissive for public service infrastructure than HC7 (1b) is for other types of development. However, the '*quantity and/or quality*' text in HC7 (1c) does not necessarily require decision makers to approve any public service infrastructure where only one limb of the test is satisfied, otherwise HC7 (1c) would simply state "*or*". The policy must be read as a whole in the context of its overarching objective with an assessment considering whether any proposed replacement, in terms of quantity and/or quality, represents equivalent or better provision to that which would be lost.

7.5 In line with the objective of HC7, the starting point for an assessment against all criteria including HC7 (1c) is that the development '*should not result in the loss of*' playing field land. Any departure from providing replacement provision that is equivalent or better in terms of both quantity and quality under HC7 (1c) should be supported by a robust justification, having regard to factors such as land availability, site-specific constraints or operational requirements, and whether the proposal would continue to meet the overall aims of the policy.

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Is the proposed replacement proportionate to the impact of the loss?

7.6 Where a departure from providing equivalent or better quantity and quality can be justified (see paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5), any replacement quantity or quality should be proportionate to the impact of the loss. This should take account of the nature of the provision to be lost (the physical facilities), along with the impact of the loss on existing users and in meeting current and future needs.

7.7 When assessing the impact, considerations should include:

- Existing users: who use the playing field and any ancillary facilities, the nature and frequency of their use, and whether they could realistically access and use the proposed replacement.
- The community served: including accessibility of the existing and proposed replacement in terms of its location and management arrangements. The guidance provided under HC7 (1b) (see paragraphs 6.9 to 6.11) should also be used here to help assess accessibility.

  Note: Unlike HC7 (1b), HC7 (1c) does not expressly require comparable or improved accessibility. Nevertheless, accessibility is a material consideration when reading the NPPF as a whole and in relation to the requirements on public bodies under the Equalities Act 2010.
- The sporting function: the sports, extent and levels of play that can be accommodated at the existing and proposed replacement provision, along with details of ancillary facilities.
- Current and future needs: the extent to which the existing proposed replacement provision meets, or could meet, needs identified in a robust and up-to-date assessment of need for playing pitches, such as the local authority's Playing Pitch Strategy.

Will replacement provision be made available for use prior to any loss?

7.8 Any new replacement areas of playing field and/or existing areas of playing field to be enhanced as a result of qualitative works, should be available for use prior to any loss (unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative timescale) and appropriately maintained. The guidance provided under HC7 (1b) (paragraphs 6.7 and 6.8) should also be used here to help ensure this is the case, reading 'proposed replacement area of playing field' as also including 'enhanced area of playing field as a result of qualitative works'.

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Where equivalent or better quantity is proposed, will the replacement provision be of an appropriate quality?

7.9 Where equivalent or better quantity, but not quality, is proposed the replacement provision should:

- Be fit for purpose for the intended users, including the current and realistic future needs of displaced users that are likely to use it.
- Follow relevant design guidance, such as Sport England's facility design guidance and that of the relevant sports national governing bodies.
- Be of an equivalent or better shape, enabling an equivalent or better layout to accommodate playing pitches and other sporting activities (see paragraph 6.6 under the HC7 (1b) guidance).
- Not result in an area of playing field being relocated from outside a floodplain to within one.
- Avoid additional constraints on its use e.g. that may result from additional amenity issues, such as noise and ball strike, by relocating provision closer to residential development.

Where qualitative works are proposed in place of, or to help offset a reduction in, the quantity of any replacement provision will they provide equivalent or better provision in terms of quality?

7.10 The guidance provided under HC7 (1b) (see paragraphs 6.3 to 6.6) should also be used here to help assess whether the quality of the proposed works will deliver equivalent or better quality. When reading the HC7 (1b) guidance for this purpose 'proposed area of replacement playing field' should also be taken to mean 'enhanced area of playing field as a result of qualitative works'.

7.11 Where qualitative works are proposed to an existing area of playing field, any assessment against HC7 (1c) should also address the following matters, along with any other relevant considerations:

- Ensuring the works do not create additional constraints on use of the existing area of playing field. This includes avoiding amenity issues that may arise from more intensive use of the playing field enabled by qualitative improvements, or ensuring the applicant secures appropriate mitigation, informed by relevant assessments such as lighting or acoustics assessments, to address the issues.
- Securing appropriate long-term maintenance. Although important for all replacement provision, this is especially critical where the benefits of qualitative works are judged to outweigh a quantitative loss. The replacement quality and resulting benefits must endure over the longer

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term, avoiding a situation where a reduction in quantity is permitted and the qualitative benefits recede over time. This is highly likely to require levels of maintenance beyond current arrangements for the existing area of playing field.

- Ensuring any benefits of the works are assessed against the quality of land to be lost, and not the site/area to be improved.
- Ensuring the works meet identified needs. The proposed improvements should be informed by relevant evidence, such as an up to date Playing Pitch Strategy, site assessment, governing body guidance, or demonstrated deficiencies in the existing provision. This should avoid assuming replacing an area of natural grass playing field with an artificial surface (e.g. a Multi-Use Games Areas or Artificial Grass Pitch) automatically provides qualitative improvements, whereas this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis informed by the need for both artificial and natural grass provision in the area (see also paragraphs 8.5 and 8.6 of the HC7 (1d) guidance).
- Ensuring qualitative works will provide genuine improvements and not just mask previous poor maintenance practices which have resulted in a poor-quality playing field.
- Providing certainty regarding delivery. The scope, funding, timing and mechanism for delivery of the qualitative works should be secured to ensure that the anticipated benefits are realised and maintained.
- Avoiding reducing accessibility or availability. The qualitative works should not result in reduced community access, displaced users, increased costs of use, or restrictions on the range of sporting activities that can be accommodated.
- Considering the impact on existing users during implementation. Any temporary loss or disruption arising from construction or improvement works should be minimised and appropriately managed.
- Demonstrating that the benefits are proportionate to the loss. The scale of the qualitative improvements should be sufficient to justify the extent of any quantitative loss and should provide clear and measurable benefits to sport.

8. Guidance for assessing applications against Policy HC7 (1d)

HC7 (1d): *The development is for alternative open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

Has the application included sufficient information?

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8.1 To enable the application to be assessed efficiently it should provide information in line with the suggested requirements in Annex C.

What should be considered when assessing the benefits of an alternative sports facility?

8.2 There may be occasions when the development of a new, extended or enhanced indoor or outdoor facility for sport, which is to be fully or partly located on an area of playing field, can be judged to be sufficiently beneficial to the development of sport in the local area as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of an area of playing field, or the impact on the use of the remaining playing field or pitches. However, such proposals require a careful assessment of the benefits they may secure against the detriment that may be caused by the loss of the area of playing field.

8.3 The potential benefits of any new, extended or enhanced sports facility on an area of a current or former playing field should be assessed taking into account several considerations. These may include whether the alternative sports facility:

- meets an identified local or strategic need, such as that set out in a local authority playing pitch strategy, sports facility strategy and/or a sports national governing body strategy (rather than duplicating existing provision).
- fully secures sport-related benefits for the local community.
- helps to meet identified sport and physical activity priorities.
- Follows relevant design guidance, such as Sport England's facility design guidance and that of the relevant sports national governing bodies.
- improves the delivery of sport and physical education on educational sites.
- Improves accessibility by alternative transport modes to the car.

In what circumstances may the loss of an area of playing field to an alternative sports facility be unacceptable?

8.4 Alongside the benefits of the alternative sports facility, an assessment against HC7 (1d) will need to demonstrate that the loss of any area of playing field will not have an unacceptable impact on the current and potential playing pitch provision on the site. For example, it is unlikely that the benefits of an alternative sports facility would outweigh a loss of an area of playing field if:

- the proposed facility does not clearly meet an identified local or strategic need.
- it would result in the main user (e.g. a school or a club) being unable to meet their own minimum requirements for playing pitches (e.g. meeting the

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Department for Education area guidelines for playing fields at existing schools and academies).

- other users would be displaced without equivalent replacement provision.
- it would materially reduce the capability and flexibility of the playing field to provide for a range of sports and playing pitches.
- the area of playing field is significant in meeting local or strategic sporting needs.

Do proposals for artificial grass pitches and multi-use games area meet HC7 (1d)?

8.5 Artificial grass pitches or multi-use games areas may be able to sustain more intensive use than natural grass playing pitches. However, they should not be preferred when assessing an application against HC7 (1d) purely for this reason. This is because a proposed artificial grass pitch or multi use games area may:

- be unsuitable to accommodate some grass pitch sports or the standards of play or grades of competition required for some sports.
- not be sufficiently flexible to readily accommodate changes in demand for playing pitch types and sizes compared to the current area of playing field.
- be a result of previous poor maintenance practices which have resulted in a poor-quality natural grass playing field which if improved could be a better option to meet local and strategic needs.

8.6 Therefore, the benefit of the proposal will need to outweigh the impact on those sports that need natural grass pitches, when assessing whether proposals for artificial grass pitches or multi-use games areas meet HC7 (1d). Alongside the considerations set out in paragraphs 8.2 to 8.4, this assessment should include reviewing any local information and advice provided by the relevant sports national governing bodies.

Does a proposal fully secure sport-related benefits for the community?

8.7 Community use of any alternative sports facility should be secured to help ensure access for the wider community as part of the benefits that could enable an application to meet HC7 (1d). Community use can be realised through a community use agreement, or equivalent arrangement, and be secured by an appropriate planning condition or legal agreement. To help secure such use, Sport England has developed a template community use agreement.

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Can proposals for sports facilities on an area of playing field, to replace existing sports facilities displaced by other development, meet HC7 (1d)?

8.8 No, proposals of this nature should not meet HC7 (1d) because they are unlikely to provide additionality in terms of sporting provision and benefits to sport due to replacing facilities lost elsewhere at the expense of an area of playing field.

Can non-sporting development meet with HC7 (1d) where it constitutes 'enabling development', i.e. to raise capital to fund new sports facilities on another part of the site?

8.9 No, as no development other than alternative open space, sports and recreational buildings and land can meet with HC7 (1d).

Can alternative open space and recreational buildings and land, including play space, informal recreation and allotments on playing fields meet HC7 (1d)?

8.10 Playing fields are essential infrastructure for sport and an active nation, providing the space needed for formal sports and informal physical activity (see our Playing Fields Statement). A robust and up-to-date local authority playing pitch strategy will help with understanding the importance of a playing field in meeting communities' current and future needs for playing pitches and other sporting activity.

8.11 In some circumstances proposals for alternative sports facilities may meet with HC7 (1d) (see paragraphs 8.2 to 8.4). However, proposals for non-sporting recreational provision on an existing playing field are only likely to clearly outweigh a loss of sporting use, and therefore meet with HC7 (1d), where they affect playing field incapable of forming part of a playing pitch and do not:

- reduce the size of any playing pitch.
- result in the inability to use any playing pitch (including the maintenance of adequate safety margins).
- 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.
- prejudice the use of any part of a playing field and any of its playing pitches.

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9. Determining applications which will adversely impact a playing field

9.1 The decision maker, e.g. the relevant local planning authority, must weigh up the planning matters relevant to a particular application. However, Government planning policy within the NPPF (Policy HC7) is clear that "*development proposals should not result in the loss of existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields….unless*" one of four criteria are met. As a national decision-making policy, Policy HC7 is a material consideration in the assessment of any relevant planning application.

9.2 If an application does not meet with any of the Policy HC7 criteria, this should weigh heavily against granting permission because of the adverse impact on a playing field and the value such land can being to sport and local communities (see our Playing Fields Statement). As set out by Government in Policy S4 of the NPPF (*Principle of development within settlements*), a substantial adverse impact in relation to the application of Policy HC7 is likely to substantially outweigh the benefits of approving development.

9.3 In addition, any comments provided by Sport England in response to a planning application should be given considerable weight. High Court decisions provide a steer as to the weight to be afforded to the views of statutory consultees, such as the East Meon CC v East Hants DC [2014] case. In quashing planning permission, the judgement for this case stated that the views of Sport England, as a statutory consultee, should be given considerable weight and only departed from for good reason.

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Annex A: Glossary

Playing Field	The National Planning Policy Framework refers to the definition contained in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Order defines a playing field as '*the whole of a site which encompasses at least one playing pitch*'. The definition refers to the whole of a site and therefore does not just cover land which is currently laid out as pitches. It also does not differentiate between different types of ownership e.g. public, private or education ownership.
Playing Pitch	The 2015 Order defines a playing pitch as '*a delineated area which, together with any run-off area, is of 0.2 hectares or more, and which is used for association football, American football, rugby, cricket, hockey, lacrosse, rounders, baseball, softball, Australian football, Gaelic football, shinty, hurling, polo or cycle polo.*' A playing pitch may have a natural or artificial surface. While other sports facilities, such as tennis courts and bowling greens, are not included in the definition of a playing pitch, they should be considered as being included in an area defined as a playing field if, in physical or functional terms, they form part of an overall playing field site.
Delineated Area	The 2015 Order does not provide a definition. Sport England considers the term to mean any marked out area of 0.2 hectares or more (including recommended safety margins) for the use of any of the sports listed in the definition of a playing pitch. Along with painted lines, an area may be marked out, and therefore delineated, by other means such as cones, ropes or the existence of a pair of permanent or temporary goalposts. An appropriate outfield should be included in this area where it may not be formally marked out but is required to support the use of a pitch, e.g. the outfield for a rounders pitch.

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Annex B: Further Sport England resources

Planning Advice Notes

- Planning applications affecting playing fields – Education (small-scale) [Currently in development]
- Ancillary facilities located on playing fields [To be developed]
- Adjacent development and the agent of change principle [To be developed]

Other guidance and resources

Planning for Sport Guidance
www.sportengland.org/planningforsport

Model Conditions
https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/planning-sport/playing-fields-policy#model-conditions-36849

Natural Turf for Sport guidance document - Part C 'Equivalent Quality Assessment'
https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/outdoor-surfaces?section=natural-turf-sports-pitches-section

Sport England Facility Design and Cost Guidance
www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/design-and-cost-guidance

Template Community Use Agreement
www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/community-use-agreements

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Annex C: Planning application information requirements

The checklist below supplements the national information requirements set out in Annex C to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its Planning Practice Guidance. It aims to help ensure applications provide sufficient information to enable local planning authorities and others to assess them against Policy HC7 effectively and efficiently.

The checklist should be used as a guide with the level of detail provided with an application being proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposed development and matters it may raise. The checklist could also help with providing appropriate information at the pre-application stage.

Note: As set out within the Government's Planning Practice Guidance, any plans or drawings must be drawn to an identified scale, and in the case of plans, must show the direction of north. Although not a requirement of legislation, the inclusion of a linear scale bar is also useful, particularly in the case of electronic submissions.

Document	Presenting detail on:
Recommended for all applications	
Existing site plan	1. Extent of the playing field as defined by The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.
	2. Location and nature of existing buildings.
	3. Location and nature of existing facilities for sport (including the layout of summer and winter playing pitches – with pitch dimensions and safety margins).
	4. Significant features (e.g. trees, slopes, paths, fences, sewers) [1].
	5. Existing levels across the site[1].
Proposed site plan	6. Location and nature of the proposed development.
	7. Extent of the area of playing field proposed to be lost (including the area covered by the proposed development and any associated works, e.g. landscaping).
	8. Location and nature of all existing and any proposed new, extended or enhanced facilities for sport (clearly showing any revised locations, layouts and dimensions from the existing plan – see point 3 above).
	9. Any changes to existing features and levels[1].
Supporting statements	10. Extent of the area of playing field proposed to be lost (area in hectares and see point 7 above).

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	11. Any proposed changes in the provision of indoor and outdoor facilities for sport on the site (including ancillary facilities) e.g. set out in a simple 'before and after' or 'loss and gain' table.	
	12. Current and recent users of the playing field and the nature and extent of their use.	
	13. How the development fits with the findings of any relevant assessment of need and/or sports related strategy (a copy of, or a web link to, the assessment or strategy should be provided)[1] [2].	
Document	Presenting detail on:	
Recommended in relation to specific Policy HC7 criterion		**HC7 Criterion**
Drawings	14. Internal layouts and elevations for proposed new, extended or enhanced facilities for sport (including relevant ancillary facilities)[1].	b, c, d
Supporting statements	15. An assessment which clearly shows the area of playing field to be surplus to requirements.	a
	16. How the development will be of benefit to sport (including benefit to existing and potential users)[2].	b, c, d
	17. Reason for the chosen location(s) of the proposed development and any replacement provision, along with reasonable alternatives considered.	b c, d
	18. The specification of any ancillary facilities e.g. sports lighting[1].	b, c, d
	19. The specification of any Artificial Grass Pitch and reason for the chosen surface type[2].	b, c, d
	20. How any replacement and/or new area of playing field and ancillary facilities will be delivered (including to what timescale).	b, c
	21. How, for any replacement area of playing field and/or any qualitative works to an existing playing field, equivalent or better quality will be achieved and maintained. These details should include[3]: a. An assessment of the quality and performance of the existing area to be lost. b. A programme of works with a set timescale for the creation of any proposed replacement area (including pitch construction) and/or for the delivery of any qualitative works to an existing playing field.	b, c

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	c. A management and monitoring plan for the replacement area and/or for any qualitative works to an existing playing field.	

[1] Level of detail proportionate to the nature of the development and its impact on the playing field.

[2] Relevant for HC7 b and c where the loss of an area of playing field with a natural grass surface is proposed to be replaced elsewhere by a new area of playing field with an artificial surface.

[3] Details should be undertaken and developed by a suitably qualified and experienced sports turf consultant, satisfy appropriate Sport England and National Governing Bodies of sport design guidance, and have regard to Sport England's 'Equivalent Quality Assessment of Natural Turf Playing Fields' briefing note.

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