

PLANNING STATEMENT

Proposed Replacement Clubhouse, Car Parking, Landscaping, and Ancillary Facilities

Newsome Panthers ARLFC, Hall Bower Lane, Huddersfield, HD4 6RR

Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the erection of a replacement clubhouse, associated parking, landscaping and ancillary facilities at Newsome Panthers ARLFC, Hall Bower Lane, Huddersfield.

The proposal seeks to replace outdated and inadequate facilities with a modern, inclusive, and sustainable clubhouse that supports rugby league, football, community activity, and promotes wider social benefit. The development responds directly to the operational needs of the club, the requirements of national governing bodies, and the feedback received during pre-application engagement with Kirklees Council, Historic England, Sport England, and local residents.

Site description

The site comprises approximately 3.3ha of sports pitches and associated structures, located off Hall Bower Lane. It includes:

- Existing modular clubhouse buildings (approx. 180m² footprint)
- Rugby pitches used by Newsome Panthers ARLFC
- Shared use by Berry Brow FC (football)
- Access via an unadopted track from Hall Bower Lane
- Surrounding agricultural land, now being extensively being converted to woodland, and dispersed residential properties

- The site lies within the Green Belt in the Kirklees Local Plan and within the wider setting of the Castle Hill Scheduled Monument.

Proposed development

The proposal includes a single-storey replacement clubhouse (covering approximately 620 square metres of floor area) containing –

- Four sport-compliant changing rooms
- Officials' changing rooms
- Social space and bar
- Kitchen
- Meeting room
- Gym/wrestle room
- General storage and storage for grounds maintenance
- Accessible WCs and baby-change facilities
- Two new dugouts
- An improved parking layout with increased capacity
- Improved vehicular site access and egress
- Ground-source heat pump and solar panels
- Extensive landscaping and biodiversity enhancements

The design incorporates timber cladding, sedum roofing, and black corrugated steel, selected to reduce visual prominence and respond to the Castle Hill Setting Study. Full details are provided in the submitted Design Statement that has been provided to support the application.

Planning policy context

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

Relevant chapters include:

Chapter 2 – Achieving sustainable development

Chapter 11 – Making effective use of land

Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

Chapter 13 – Protecting Green Belt land

Chapter 14 – Climate change and flooding

Chapter 15 – Natural environment

Chapter 16 – Historic environment

Kirklees Local Plan (2019)

Relevant policies include:

LP1 – Sustainable development

LP2 – Place shaping

LP3 – Location of development

LP7 – Efficient use of land

LP20 - 22 – Transport, highways, parking

LP24 – Design

LP28 – Drainage

LP30 – Biodiversity

LP50 – Sports and physical activity

LP51–52 – Environmental protection

LP53 – Contaminated land

LP56 – Facilities for outdoor sport in the Green Belt

Principle of Development

Green Belt assessment

The NPPF establishes that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl. Inappropriate development is harmful by definition and substantial weight must be given to any harm.

However, certain forms of development are not inappropriate, including:

NPPF 154(b)

The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land for outdoor sport) as long as they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

NPPF 154(d)

The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.

NPPF 155(e)

Limited infilling or redevelopment of previously developed land... which would not have a greater impact on openness.

To qualify as appropriate development, the proposal must satisfy three tests:

Test 1: Is the development an “appropriate facility” for outdoor sport?

Yes. The clubhouse provides essential facilities required by the Rugby Football League (RFL), Football Foundation (FF), and Sport England –

- Changing rooms (male, female, junior, officials)
- Showers and WCs
- Storage
- Gym/wrestle room
- Social space for team meetings, safeguarding, first aid, and community sport
- Kitchen and bar (ancillary to sport, not a commercial venue)
- Accessibility improvements

- PDRL (disability rugby) facilities

These are not luxury or commercial uses—they are core operational requirements for a modern community sports club.

Test 2: Is the development “in connection with the existing use of the land”?

Yes. The land has been used for sport since at least 2002 (planning ref. 2002/91533). The proposed development enhances the existing rugby and football use. There is no change of use.

Test 3: Does the development preserve openness and avoid conflict with Green Belt purposes?

With regards to spatial openness, the building footprint increases from 180 square metres to 619 square metres **but** it remains single-storey, it is located on the same developed part of the site, it does not extend built form into open fields, and it consolidates existing structures into one building, reducing clutter.

With regards to visual openness, the design is landscape-led. It has a sedum roof, timber cladding, dark recessive materials, low eaves, broken massing, and is sited against existing car park and cricket buildings.

The proposal does not lead to sprawl, cause settlement merging, encroach into countryside (the site is already a sports complex), harm the setting of historic towns (Historic England confirms no harm at pre-application stage), or undermine regeneration.

It is therefore concluded that the proposed development at least preserves openness in both spatial and visual terms.

In terms of an assessment against NPPF 154(d): Replacement Building, it is contended that although the footprint is larger, case law (e.g., *Heathrow Airport Ltd v SSCLG*) confirms that “materially larger” is a matter of planning judgment, not a simple percentage test.

In this instance, the use remains identical (sports clubhouse). The existing building is functionally unacceptable and the new building is proportionate to modern sporting requirements. The height remains low and single-storey and the building consolidates multiple structures into one, thus reducing clutter.

With regards to an assessment against NPPF 155(e): Previously Developed Land (PDL), the site contains existing buildings, hardstanding, car parking, and storage containers. This area therefore qualifies as previously developed land.

The proposed development only extends development beyond the PDL envelope due to the proposed additional car parking and it has no greater impact on openness than the existing spread of structures. It also improves visual quality through removal of poor-quality modular buildings.

In conclusion, the proposed development is not held to be inappropriate development. The proposal satisfies NPPF 154(b) and Local Plan policy LP56, and therefore is not inappropriate development as it preserves openness and does not conflict with Green Belt purposes

Although the proposal qualifies as not inappropriate development under NPPF 154(b), a Very Special Circumstances (VSC) case is also provided for robustness.

VSC exist where -

The harm to the Green Belt and any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The components of the VSC case are set out below-

There is a critical need for modern, inclusive sports facilities. The existing facilities are not fit for purpose, failing RFL and Football Foundation standards. Women's rugby collapsed in 2023 due to inadequate changing provision and PDRL players cannot be accommodated safely or inclusively. In addition, demand for junior rugby has doubled in 3 years. As such, this is a strategic community need, not a convenience.

The proposed scheme will deliver significant public health and social outcomes. Newsome ward is within the top 7% of the most deprived areas nationally. The Club provides knife-crime diversion, mental health support, and youth mentoring and the proposed clubhouse will be the only accessible community facility in the immediate area. Information on the Club's Business Plan has been submitted to support the application in terms of a demonstration of need.

These benefits are unique, location-specific, and cannot be delivered elsewhere. There is no reasonable alternative site - the club must remain adjacent to its pitches and relocation is impossible due to land availability, cost, and loss of community identity. The existing site is the only viable location for the required facilities.

With regards to heritage and design, Historic England confirms at pre-application stage that there is no harm to the Castle Hill Scheduled Ancient Monument or to any other heritage assets. The design is landscape-led, with sedum roofing and timber cladding and the building sits within an existing cluster of sports structures which significantly reduces Green Belt impact.

There is also an enhancement of playing field capacity, as the proposed scheme improves pitch usability, safety, and maintenance. The scheme supports rugby and football collaboration and enables year-round community sport. This aligns directly with Sport England's strategic priorities.

There are environmental and climate change benefits in support of a replacement clubhouse. Ground-source heat pumps, solar PVs, a sedum roof, BNG exceeding 10% and sustainable drainage are all benefits that are significant and permanent.

To conclude VSC, the combination of critical community need, significant public health and social benefits, the lack of an alternative location, a heritage-compliant design, environmental gains, and enhanced sports provision clearly outweigh the limited Green Belt harm and so VSC therefore exist in this instance.

Sport England compliance

This section demonstrates compliance with Sport England's Playing Fields Policy and Exception 2.

Exception 2 allows 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.

In terms of ancillary facilities, the proposed replacement clubhouse provides accommodation as set out in the section “Proposed development” (above). All are ancillary to the use of the playing field.

There is no loss of pitch quantity. The plans demonstrate that three rugby pitches are retained. There is no encroachment into playing areas. Also, there is no loss of pitch quality. PitchPower assessments have been undertaken and GMA guidance followed. There are no changes to pitch gradients or drainage and maintenance access is improved.

No works undertaken will be prejudicial to use. Run-off distances are maintained and access routes improved.

Due to the proximity of Hall Bower Cricket Club, an ECB ball-strike assessment has been undertaken and submitted with this application, with appropriate and proportionate mitigation incorporated.

In respect of NGB technical compliance, the building has been designed to meet

- RFL changing room sizes
- FF changing room and shower cubicle requirements
- Officials’ changing room requirements
- Safeguarding and privacy standards
- Accessible design standards

Therefore, the proposed scheme supports the principal use of the site for sport; does not reduce pitch quantity or pitch quality; does not prejudice pitch use; and enhances the long-term viability of the playing field.

The development therefore meets Sport England’s Exception 2.

Design and visual impact

In terms of compliance with Local Plan policy LP24 and NPPF Chapter 12, the design reflects agricultural vernacular through timber and metal cladding, uses a sedum roof to soften massing, and a single-storey design to reduce prominence. The information provided to support the application includes contextual site sections and visualisations and responds directly to pre-application advice.

A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, a Landscaping Plan, and a Management Plan have been submitted with the application which demonstrates that the visual impact of the proposed works is acceptable in terms of site context and that landscaping and management will ensure that any limited visual impact can be adequately mitigated.

Castle Hill setting

The Heritage Statement provided to support the application concludes -

The proposed scheme does not constitute an adverse change in the setting of the Scheduled Monument.

Historic England's formal response (17 Feb 2026) confirms -

Historic England has no concerns and would not object... The proposal would result in no harm to the significance of the Scheduled Monument.

The proposal therefore complies with NPPF Chapter 16 and Local Plan policy LP24.

Highways and transport

In accordance with Local Plan policies LP20–LP22 and NPPF paragraph 117, a Transport Statement has been prepared to support the application.

The access has been re-designed, in conjunction with Stirley Farm Community Trust and Kirklees Council, to provide visibility splays of 2.4m x 43m at the junction of the access with Hall Bower Lane and a swept path analysis confirms safe access and egress.

On-site parking capacity has been increased to address resident concerns, including additional parking on the widened access track and additional, sensitively designed parking on the site (to include dedicated disabled parking). Matchday management plans will be implemented by the Club.

The adjacent Public Right of Way is protected and unobstructed.

With regards to the pre-application response received from the Council, Kirklees Highways DM concerns have been addressed in full.

Ecology and biodiversity

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal submitted with the application confirms that there are no significant ecological constraints, there is no impact on protected species, there are no ponds within 500m, and that there is a low ecological value of existing habitats.

The scheme delivers at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain through –

- Native tree planting
- Hedgerow enhancement
- Bird and bat boxes
- Insect towers
- Log and brash piles
- Sedum roofing

The proposal complies with Local Plan policy LP30 and the Environment Act 2021.

Community benefits

The clubhouse delivers substantial public benefits, including (but not limited to) –

- An expansion of girls' and women's rugby
- The reintroduction of women's open-age team
- The development of PDRL (disability rugby)
- A safe space for young people in an area with elevated deprivation
- Mental health workshops
- Community events
- Collaboration with Berry Brow FC

Other matters

Land contamination – a Phase I report has been submitted with the application.

Drainage and other services – the site is already connected to mains drainage and services.

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The SCI submitted with the application shows that 150+ households invited to a drop-in event. Twenty seven residents attended and parking was the only concern raised. The revised parking layout is considered to resolve these concerns. No objections were received to the proposed scheme and there appears to be strong community support for the proposal

Conclusion

The proposed replacement clubhouse represents a well-designed, policy-compliant, community-enhancing development that constitutes not inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The proposed scheme preserves openness, causes no harm to the setting of Castle Hill, and enhances sports provision in accordance with Local Plan policies LP50 and LP56.

The proposed development also meets Sport England's Exception 2 test, improves biodiversity, addresses all highways, ecological, and design matters, and delivers significant public benefit.

As such, the proposed development is considered to be capable of approval subject to any reasonable and necessary conditions.