

Rochdale AFC and Rochdale Borough Council are jointly developing proposals to create a new Football and Community Wellbeing Hub at Bowlee Playing Fields in Middleton.

The project is currently at the pre-planning consultation stage. Emerging proposals are being shared with local residents, sports clubs, community organisations, schools and other stakeholders to provide an opportunity for the public to understand the plans, ask questions and submit feedback ahead of a formal planning application.

Bowlee Playing Fields is an important community sports site, however it's existing infrastructure is limited. The site is affected by longstanding drainage issues, several grass pitches are not consistently usable, and the current pavilion no longer meets the scale or quality required to support modern community sport. At the same time, there is strong demand across Rochdale for higher-quality, year-round football facilities, more reliable training and match space, and enhanced opportunities to support community health and wellbeing.

The proposed Bowlee Football and Community Wellbeing Hub is designed to address these challenges by transforming the site into a modern, managed sports and community facility. The project would bring together community football, health and fitness, community use and elite sports facilities within one coordinated hub.

The proposals include a Football Hub on one half of the site which would host Rochdale AFC's First Team while also serving the wider community through Rochdale AFC Community Trust. Plans for this area include:

- A two-storey building providing community offices, changing and social space, alongside first team and elite changing facilities, gym, media, offices and recreation facilities.
- One full-size 3G artificial grass pitch for Rochdale AFC Community Trust teams and programmes.
- A grass training area for Rochdale AFC elite use.
- A retained and improved community grass football pitch.

The remaining half of the site would be operated by Your Trust, with a focus on community wellbeing and wider sports provision. This would include:

- A new community sports pavilion.
- A 40-station health and fitness gym.
- A community room, café / social space and kitchen.
- Retained cricket provision through new cricket nets.

- Two full-size community 3G artificial grass pitches.
- Changing rooms and officials' facilities.

Across the site as a whole, the development would deliver landscape and biodiversity improvements, improved access, parking and internal circulation, an outdoor play area along with improvements to shared outdoor spaces.

The aim not only to replace existing facilities but to significantly improve the quality, reliability and capacity of sports provision at Bowlee. Artificial grass pitches can be used much more intensively than grass pitches, including during evenings and periods of poor weather, helping to reduce cancellations and expand participation opportunities for children, young people, adults, women and girls, disability football, schools, clubs and community users.

The development would establish Bowlee as a more active and welcoming community destination. The site's dual approach would allow for both dedicated football provision and broader health and wellbeing activities.

Your Trust, a local charity delivering leisure, health and culture services across Rochdale borough, would operate the new pavilion, gym, café and community space, supporting a wider programme of health and wellbeing initiatives beyond organised football. This aligns with ongoing efforts from partners working across the borough to increase physical activity levels, reduce inequalities and create more accessible opportunities for residents to stay active.

For Rochdale AFC, the development would provide an opportunity to establish a long-term First Team training and community base within the borough, bringing elite and community operations together for the first time as part of the club's long-term sustainability strategy.

Rochdale AFC Community Trust would gain a permanent home for its teams and programmes, supporting established club-community teams such as Ladies and Walking Football while enabling further growth in Veterans (over 35's), Military Veterans, refugee support (Hope), Ability Counts (disability) and All Stars (Down syndrome) teams. The development is also expected to release additional pitch capacity across the borough for other grassroots teams.

For Rochdale Borough Council, the development represents a significant investment in community sports infrastructure. It would enhance an existing public facility, address known pitch quality and drainage issues, support grassroots football, retain cricket provision, and strengthen the long-term sporting and wellbeing offer for Middleton and the wider borough.

The partners are working closely with key sporting organisations including the Football Foundation, Lancashire County Football Association, Sport England and Lancashire

County Cricket Association, to ensure the proposals meet local needs and align with planning and funding requirements.

The shared ambition of all partners is to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and sustainable facility that benefits local residents, grassroots clubs, schools, community groups, Rochdale AFC and future generations across the borough. Feedback gathered during the consultation period will inform the final proposals, the planning application and the future operation of the facility.