

Report to: Leisure Strategy Delivery Forum

Date of Meeting 13 January 2026

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Playing Pitch Strategy – Executive Summary and Action Plan

Report summary:

The last update to the Forum in September 2025 summarises the key findings of the 2025 Playing Pitch Audit of current facility provision.

This report explains how the information will inform decision making in relation to current and future provision through a Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS). An Executive Summary and Action Plan is now included for consideration prior to some stakeholder engagement notably with Town and Parish Councils and schools.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☐ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Forum

Asks officers to consult with Parish and Town Councils on the draft key principles set out in this report along with the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy Executive Summary and Action Plan and return to Committee with feedback and final edition for endorsement.

Reason for recommendation:

To provide the Forum with an update on the delivery of an updated PPOSS in order to provide the services and facilities necessary to support the residents of East Devon

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

The impact of the PPOSS on the protected characteristics groups and the implications for the Public Sector Equality Duty. It is intended that the strategy will be generally positive for all

groups and will promote equality for all by taking into account the accessibility of buildings and their location.

The provision of quality facilities for sport and physical activity is a key influence on health. It is important that there are choices for participation for people of different interests, ages, income groups and abilities and in different locations so that residents have access to opportunities that suit them.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk

The primary risk is a failure to secure the collaborative approach required to deliver the strategy. There is however good partnership working across the sports sector and a consensus among key organisations to work together on the key issues affecting existing and future provision.

The local plan policy should/will be used to determine planning applications and if the local plan does not reference a completed PPOSS there is a danger that it (the PPOSS) will carry lesser weight in determining planning applications (getting the best outcomes that the council wishes to achieve).

If the PPOSS does not make progress towards being endorsed for use in determining planning applications, then there is a risk that relevant evidence will not be available when significant applications are considered throughout the District.

The level of future income / grant opportunities may be limited; and/or priorities for spending on strategic projects could lie elsewhere.

Links to background information

- Previous updates to the Forum –
- January 2025 - [Playing Pitch Audit and Strategy Update.pdf](#)
- April 2025 - [Playing Pitch Audit and Leisure Strategy Action Plan Update - April 25.pdf](#)
- September 2025 - [Update on Playing Pitch Audit - Key Findings.pdf](#)

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary

Appendix 2 – Action Plan

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
CIL	Community Infrastructure levy
PPOSS	Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy
IDP	Infrastructure Delivery Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
AGP	Artificial Grass Pitch 2G (Sand based) 3G (Rubber Crumb based)

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The previous Leisure Forum Report in September provided the background for the project. The headlines were that;
- The previous PPOSS was undertaken in 2015.
 - The Leisure Strategy 2021 – 2031 identifies the current and future built leisure facility needs of East Devon’s population through to 2031. The PPOSS will identify outdoor sports pitches and facility needs through to 2042.
 - The PPOSS forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and its findings will feed into future updates of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and other Development Plan Documents, which, to date, have been based on the 2015 PPOSS findings.
 - Guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012 DCLG)
 - Specific methodology prescribed and validated by Sport England and relevant sports governing bodies.
 - The IDP will set out the updated requirements for sports infrastructure on sites of new housing development, including any provision standards the council may wish to apply, and inform the charge rate for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which will contribute to strategic sports provision.
- 1.2 In January 2025, the Forum re-affirmed the Vision, Purpose and Objectives for this project.
- Vision:
- The vision of the PPOSS is to ensure that sufficient pitches are provided of a good quality and which support the needs of each sport and the clubs around East Devon taking account of cross-border considerations with adjoining local authorities. This provision should be sufficient and flexible to deal with current and projected increases in demand.
- Purpose:
- The purpose of the Strategy is to provide information on this existing provision and the long terms needs of the area, enabling decisions to be made on which spaces and facilities should be protected or improved whilst identifying provision which may no longer be suitable. It also identifies gaps in provision and suggests policy approaches to address deficiencies in quantity, quality and accessibility.
- 1.3 This will provide the evidence to help guide investment from a range of bodies (including but not limited to the Council) in pitch sport facilities around the district. (including but not limited to these below)
- Developer contributions raised through Section 106 Agreements (S106)
 - Developer contributions raised through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
 - Council capital and maintenance budgets;
 - Clubs (both their own finance and to access grant funding);
 - Town and parish councils;
 - Sport England;
 - National Governing Bodies (Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Tennis);
 - Active Devon / Devon County Council;
 - School Trusts and Academies
 - Leisure operators such as LED; and
 - Others.
- 1.4 The PPOSS sets out in detail the council’s approach to local and strategic sports provision, reinforcing the planning guidance and setting out the council’s aspirations to maintain the District’s reputation for quality leisure provision.

- 1.5 Any on-going revenue costs arising from proposals to enhance or provide new facilities will need to be identified and appropriate additional resources secured before any scheme is approved. Due regard will also be taken to integrate any schemes into other council projects and strategies that are in place. (i.e. Cranbrook and Marlcombe). Any provision on school sites would need to be approved by DCC or relevant academy organisation.

2.0 Playing Pitch Audit – Stage D

- 2.1 The development of the council's PPOSS has followed a model framework prescribed by Sport England to support the formal planning process, which focusses on facilities for:
- Football • Hockey • Rugby Union • Cricket
- 2.2 For the purpose of the council's strategic approach, other outdoor sports facilities are also included in the PPOSS. These outdoor facilities have the evidence base in the playing pitch audit :
- Bowling Greens • Tennis Courts • Netball Courts
- 2.3 A steering group was established, comprising representatives from the National Governing Bodies for the four sports and from Sport England, together with council officers. The consultant report with the research and recommendations for these sports. Subject to final ratification, the steering group formally signed off the documentation in December 2025.
- 2.4 There was extensive consultation with the sports sector as part of the research and audit work. There will continue to be regular engagement with, and involvement of, providers to progress delivery of the actions in the Strategy.
- 2.5 One notable element of feedback from the sports and community sector was related to business rates. This will be covered in more detail in a separate report to the Forum in 2026.
- 2.6 Using the information obtained through the audit of outdoor pitch facilities, and other information as available, the PPOSS informs key principles around the proposals to Protect, Enhance or Provide in order to meet the projected needs for the relevant sports to 2042. The completion of Stage D has focused on the;
- Development of facility type and site-specific action plans
 - Final Playing Pitch Audit Report

3.0 Key Principles

- 3.1 The Leisure Strategy 2021 - 2031 sets out some key principles that align to the proposed PPOSS;
1. That the provision of facilities for residents and visitors alike is an essential function of this Council.
 2. That such facilities are important to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors alike and thereby support national and local public health initiatives.
 3. That such facilities are inclusive and must cater for all residents and visitors, irrespective of ability, age, gender, ethnicity, income and belief.
 4. That the term "Leisure Facilities" refers to all facilities be they built or non-built, man-made or natural which are used, or could be used to deliver the concept of Leisure within East Devon.
 5. That such facilities, are provided by a range of providers including the Council, its partners, community organisations, private facilities and schools.
 6. That this Strategy will co-exist and support other strategies, particularly Leisure, Culture, Tourism and Public Health to promote amongst the residents of East Devon the needs of good health, positive wellbeing, cultural diversity and economic development irrespective of age, gender, orientation, ethnicity, income and belief.

3.2 Following consideration of the findings, facility needs are identified for each sports facility type according to the following three potential strategic courses of action:

- o **PROTECT** sports facilities from loss as a result of development.
- o **ENHANCE** existing facilities through improving their quality, accessibility and / or management.
- o **PROVIDE** new or larger facilities that are fit for purpose to meet demands for participation now and in the future.

This process culminates in a clear set of priority projects for future investment in sports and recreation facilities based on a robust assessment of both facility needs and opportunities for new or enhanced provision.

3.3 PROTECT

Retain and maintain existing facilities which are highly valued by the community.

1.1	The council support local communities to retain and maintain local facilities through advice and funding support (grants, S106, Community Infrastructure Fund) where available.
1.2	The transfer of stand-alone sports pavilions to local communities should be explored to increase opportunities for greater community involvement, income generation and facility improvements
1.3	The council should work with partners to support self-management of facilities by voluntary sports clubs and other relevant not for profit organisations
1.4	Clubs with issues relating to security of tenure of their premises should be supported to minimise risks and increase long term sustainability
1.5	The council should support, and incentivise where possible, local schools and facility providers to unlock potential for greater community access to the District's sports facilities, specifically sports halls and pools that are on school sites

3.3 ENHANCE

Improve the quality and capacity of facilities which are highly valued by the community

2.1	The council should work with the Football Foundation, the RFU and other funding partners on the quality and sustainability of grass pitches, and take a flexible approach to the number of pitches, in order to more adequately respond to local needs, changing demands and patterns of use in team sport participation
2.2	The council should work with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and other funding partners to facilitate improvements to Exmouth Tennis Centre to maintain its reputation as a centre of excellence by 2028
2.3	Providers of All Weather Pitches should be supported to increase capacity through the addition of floodlights where feasible

3.4 PROVIDE

Where there is evidence of need that cannot be met by existing provision, enable the development of new provision

3.1	Formal discussions should be held with neighbouring authorities, DCC, Sport England and sports governing bodies to secure partnership approach for strategic facilities wherever possible
3.2	The council should work with the Football Foundation, the RFU and other funding partners to support an increase in the number of quality artificial grass pitches by the equivalent of 4 full size AGPs by 2035 subject to robust business cases
3.3	Land should be set aside in the next phase of development at Cranbrook and second community for the provision of a new strategic sports hub comprising of indoor facilities and outdoor facilities (grass pitches, artificial pitch and hard surface courts) to meet the long term future needs of the residents within the District.
3.4	All new local sport facilities should be situated close to other community amenities where possible (community facilities, recreation areas etc.) to form part of a hub for community activity and social interaction and minimise disruption to residents
3.5	The council should focus resources for new local provision in areas that have the greatest deficiencies of opportunities for sports participation
3.6	Developer contributions should be secured through planning obligations and CIL, to contribute to the delivery of new sports facilities.

4 Draft PPOSS – Stage E (Executive Summary - Appendix 1)

- 4.1 The completion of Stage E focused on the;
- Production of the Draft Playing Pitch and Open Space Strategy (Appendix 1)
 - Production of the Draft Playing Pitch and Open Space Action Plan. (Appendix 2)
 - Basis for consultation prior to formal adoption by Cabinet and by Full Council.
 - Application and delivery of the strategy
- 4.2 The Forum will note that the actions relate to council facilities and to those owned by other organisations. For the latter, the Strategy set out the council's intention with regard to potential support for those facilities, which in most cases, reflects aspirations and priorities identified through the consultation and projects already under development.
- 4.3 The District Council focus will primarily focus on short term plan due to the pending outcomes of the Local Government Review.
- 4.4 The council will continue to secure Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards improvements to facilities in accordance with NPPF for planning obligations. This means there has to be a more considered and strategic approach linking development sites with identified projects – the PPOSS helps officers to achieve this.
- 4.5 The PPOSS also provides more specific identification of the individual schemes to which contributions could be allocated –using the research and analysis now available.
- 4.6 Any on-going revenue costs arising from proposals to enhance or provide new facilities will need to be identified and appropriate additional resources secured before any scheme is approved.
- 4.7 Grant funding and other sources of capital will continue to be explored to provide or improve those sports facilities where planning obligations cannot be justified.
- 4.8 The Forum will note that the actions relate to council facilities and to those owned by other organisations. For the latter, the Strategy set out the council's intention with regard to potential support for those facilities, which in most cases, reflects aspirations and priorities identified through the consultation and projects already under development. The Strategy highlight whether the council's role will be to 'lead', 'collaborate' or 'advocate' in order to progress the action.
- **Lead** – take responsibility for planning, delivery, monitoring and review
 - **Support** – play an active role in delivery partnership (i.e. s106 / CI / Grants)
 - **Advocate** – seek to influence and offer support as appropriate (Supporting letter for grants)

- 4.9 There was extensive consultation with the sports sector as part of the research and audit work. There will continue to be regular engagement with, and involvement of, providers to progress delivery of the actions in the Strategy.

Short Term (1 – 2 Years)

Football

- Lead the development of grass provision through planning obligations to secure the future delivery of the requirements for
 - Cranbrook (South of) and Marlcombe
- Support development of youth provision.
 - Honiton - St Rita's Centre and Tower Hill Application (subject to planning consideration)
- Advocate the improvement in the quality of grass pitches whenever possible with priority informed by geographical and physical access to
 - Cliff Field / Cranbrook Education Campus / Back Lane Playing Field / Bickton College
The Kings School Devon / Hawkchurch Playing Field / Sidford Recreation Ground
- Advocate investment in ancillary facilities with priority informed by geographical and physical access given to:
 - Clyst Valley / Candy's Field / Stantway Playing Field / Elizabeth Road Playing Field / Greenway Lane / Winslade Park and Colyton FC.

All Weather Pitches –

- Lead the development of 3G AGP provision through planning obligations to secure the future delivery of the requirements for
 - Cranbrook (South of) and Marlcombe (Football / Rugby and Hockey)
- Support the development of 3G AGP provision
 - Honiton Community College
- Support Town Council to explore possible sites for 3G AGP provision
 - Exmouth – Football & Rugby and Sidford Rec- Hockey
- Support maximise community use especially at weekends for match play.
 - Colyton, Sidmouth and Ottery
- Advocate installation of sports lighting to maximise opportunities for community use
 - Sidmouth Leisure Centre (subject to local planning position / judgement)

Cricket

- Lead the development of cricket provision through planning obligations to secure the future delivery of the requirements for
 - Marlcombe
- Advocate improvement to grass wickets quality with priority informed by geographical and physical access (All clubs listed below)
 - Back Lane PF – Branscombe – Broadclyst – Chardstock – Cloakham Lawn –
 - Fenton PF - King George (Uplyme) - Pymtree PF - Sidbury - Tipton St John –
 - Withycombe PF - Woodbury Village –
- Support second site to meet capacity
 - Exmouth

Netball

- Lead the development of netball provision through planning obligations to secure the future delivery of the requirements for
 - Marlcombe
- Support engagement with England Netball and LTA to improve playing surface
 - Cranford Sports Club –
- Support engagement with School Trust and Sports Club to improve playing surface and advocate exploration of covering over courts
 - Honiton Leisure Centre -

Tennis

- Lead the development of netball provision through planning obligations to secure the future delivery of the requirements for

- Marlcombe
- Support LTA registration and provide online booking to court journey
 - Broadclyst Rec / Kilminster Club / Peace Memorial PF / Seaford Grds / Winslade and Winters Lane.
- Advocate improvements to court quality
 - Cranford Sports Club / Phear Park / Winslade Park / Woodbury Rec / Winters Lane
- Support enhanced opportunities for tennis activity on site
 - Cranbrook Education / Broadclyst LC / Colyton LC

Medium Term (3 – 5 yrs)

Football

- Advocate exploration of potential for increased community use (very limited at present time)
 - Exeter City FC (Cliff Vale)
- Advocate improvement of all pitches to good quality and to support community use with priority informed by geographical and physical access to
 - Back lane / Bicton College / Cliff Field / Cranbrook Education / Glebe Park / Hawkchurch PF / Knowle Cross Rec / Kings School (Devon)
- Advocate improvements of all pitches to good quality and to support community use. Consider the development of improved ancillary provision with priority informed by geographical and physical access to
 - Candy's Field / Clyst Vale FC / Colyton FC / Elizabeth Road PF / Greenway Lane PF / Stantway PF / Winslade Park Ave.

Hockey

- Support sustainability of pitch and ensure maximum community use.
 - Ottery LC / St Peters School –

Rugby

- Advocate additional sports lighting and investment in auxiliary provision
 - Honiton / Exmouth (Rayleigh) Exeter (Old Mill Lane) Sidmouth (Sidford) - Sidmouth (Blackmore)
- Advocate additional sports lighting
 - Exmouth (Imperial)

Netball

- Support engagement with England Netball and LTA to install sports lighting.
 - Cranford Sports Club –

Tennis

- Support enhanced opportunities for tennis activity on site
 - Cranbrook Education / Broadclyst LC / Colyton LC
- Advocate improvements to court quality
 - Branoc Hall

Long Term (6yrs +)

General points across all sports which will be subject to

- Advocate sustainability of pitch quality and ensure community use is maximised
- Advocate improvements of pitch quality and explore the opportunity to develop community use agreements
- Advocate maintenance of Sites and Lawn Quality at bowling clubs.
- Advocate improvement of quality of Non Turf Pitch / wickets at school sites for cricket
- Lead next iteration of the Playing Pitch Audit and Playing Pitch Action Plan due in 5 years time (2030)

4.10 Wherever possible, key stakeholders and potential funding sources are identified. For schemes which could be part funded by developers' contributions, the strategy suggests how this could be allocated, subject to discussions with relevant ward councillors from the areas of housing development which have generated the contribution.

- 4.11 This strategy will be reviewed and refreshed as schemes and projects are developed, delivered or changed. After further feasibility work, some projects may be considered unviable. All of the projects identified are aspirational however the overarching approach of this strategy is one of optimism, and over the next few years we will do what we can to enhance yet further the facilities that add so much to lives of residents in East Devon.
- 4.12 As an example, many full-size Tennis facilities can be adapted for junior versions of the game in club and organised settings and also Paddle and Pickle Ball variations. Officers have raised this with the Lawn Tennis Association which recognises the benefit of different forms of the game and intends to launch a new Tennis Strategy in 2026 which will provide some more information and support for this type of initiative. The PPOSS will need to be flexible to take into account the recommendations from the LTA when it is published.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The central challenge for the District Council in times of continuing budget pressure for local authorities is to address both the current identified facility shortfall (in both quality and quantity) as well as keeping pace with community provision for the ever-increasing population. This also plays out against an uncertain backdrop of a changing political landscape around the Local Government Review.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, the PPOSS should be used as evidence to help determine planning applications and inform future planning policy requirements within the new East Devon Local Plan or other planning policy documents within the planning process.
- 5.3 Other bodies are encouraged to use the Audit findings and PPOSS to inform their investment and improvement plans and the Council will use the strategy to inform decisions on partnerships that it may enter into.
- 5.4 This work support efforts to ensure that the sports facilities in the District continue to provide a choice of quality and accessible opportunities for participation in sport.
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Financial implications:

Delivering the aspirations for enhanced or new infrastructure would require significant capital expenditure and ongoing revenue expenditure which would be sought from a range of sources.

Any proposal for new provision would be accompanied by a robust business plan so the financial implications are fully understood.

The council will continue to secure S106 Developers' Contributions (S106) or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards improvements to facilities in accordance with NPPF policies for planning obligations.

Additionally, grant funding and other sources of capital will be explored to provide or improve those sports facilities where planning obligations cannot be justified.

It is expected that further reports would be brought to Cabinet for individual plans requiring financial support from this council. Any on-going revenue costs would need to be met from within approved budgets.

Legal implications:

There is no statutory duty for the council to provide or support sports and leisure facilities. Any S106 contributions must be spent in accordance with the purpose for which they were collected and within the area of the development which generated the contribution, where specified, and in accordance with the regulations of the National Planning Policy Framework. As noted in the report, full Council's approval may be required to the revised Strategy when it is in its final form. This should be addressed at the point that the draft Strategy is submitted to Cabinet for approval, by way of Officer recommendations stage.