

Report to: Leisure Strategy Delivery Forum

Date of Meeting 23rd June 2026

Heading/Title: Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan

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Key decision: No

If a Key Decision has it appeared on Forward Plan

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: Para 3 Schedule 12A Information relating to the finance or business affairs of any particular person

1. Background

- 1.1 The last update to the Forum in January 2026 provided a draft Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS).
- 1.2 At the Forum, Officers were asked to conduct stakeholder engagement with Town and Parish Councils, National Governing Bodies, colleges and community schools on the draft key principles and detail set out. Officers now return to Committee with feedback and a final edition for endorsement onto Cabinet.

2. Recommendations/Decision

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Forum

Consider the feedback from the consultation set out in this report and how this has shaped the final edition of the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy Executive Summary and Action Plan.

Subject to endorsement, recommend that the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy itself, the Executive Summary and Action Plan are submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Once it has been approved, Officers will provide an update on progress against the Action Plan to the Forum on an annual basis.

3. Reasons for Recommendations/Decision

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

4. Options

- 4.1 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).

5. Relevance to Council Plan/priorities

- 5.1 Set out how report links to the Council Plan/priorities:

- A supported and engaged community that has the right homes in the right places, with appropriate infrastructure
- A sustainable environment that is moving towards carbon neutrality and which promotes ecological recovery.
- A vibrant and resilient economy that supports local business, provides local jobs and leads to a reduction in poverty and inequality.
- A well-managed, financially secure and continuously improving council that delivers quality services

5.2 Indicate how the recommendations/decision contributes to the delivery of the Council Plan and its priorities

A supported and engaged community that has the right homes in the right places, with appropriate infrastructure

- Deliver our Leisure Strategy and action plan to improve access for residents to leisure facilities within the district.

A well-managed, financially secure and continuously improving council that delivers quality services

- Implement the Financial Sustainability Model to identify service costs, enhance performance, drive efficiencies, savings, and maximize income, ensuring the Council's budget remains balanced.

6.0 Background

- 6.1 A previous Leisure Forum Report in January 2026 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 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.

7.0 Consultation

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

7.2 The Council's Communication team were very supportive throughout this exercise and have produced a clear report set out in Appendix 1

7.4 This includes a breakdown of:

- Survey goals, methodology and process
- Data analysis of the survey responses
- Key findings and recommendations
- Actual responses and how they have been addressed.

7.5 The committee report along with the PPOSS Executive Summary and Action plan were distributed to all the Town and Parish Councils, providers including LED, Community Colleges and schools and National Governing Bodies. Key questions were to;

- Test whether the draft key principles are clear, appropriate and achievable.
- Identify local issues, priorities and constraints affecting the provision of outdoor sports facilities, including access, capacity and quality.
- Gather practical feedback to strengthen the Action Plan and support effective delivery.
- Ensure the Strategy reflects local demand and the realities of day-to-day facility management and provision.

7.6 A webinar was also provided and saw representation from many of the main Towns and Parishes which included a presentation from the consultant who carried out the work and a Q and A session at the end.

8.0 Key Findings

Following receipt of feedback, the Communications Team identified some key findings

- Broad support for the draft key principles, with many respondents confirming that they are clear, appropriate and aligned with national guidance, including Sport England methodology and Local Plan objectives.
- Strong emphasis on the importance of protecting and improving the quality of existing facilities, particularly where pitches are rated as 'Standard' or 'Poor', before prioritising new provision.
- Consistent feedback highlighting capacity shortfalls for all weather provision, especially for football, rugby and hockey training, and the need for additional or upgraded Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) in several parts of the district.
- Repeated calls for greater recognition of schools as strategic sites for community sports provision, balanced with the need to protect curriculum use, safeguarding requirements and site management constraints.
- Identification of perceived gaps or inconsistencies within the draft Action Plan, including the omission of some existing facilities (such as netball courts, tennis courts or cricket sites), and differing levels of priority assigned to comparable sites.
- Strong interest from Town and Parish Councils in ensuring that local growth, including new housing allocations, is appropriately linked to future sports facility provision through developer contributions and partnership working.
- Recognition that long term sustainability, including maintenance, management and operating models, is critical to the successful delivery of new or improved facilities.

9.0 Key Recommendations from consultation

- 9.1 Drawing on the consultation feedback, the following recommendations will inform refinement of the final Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy:
- Maintain the overall strategic direction and key principles of the PPOSS, reflecting the strong support expressed through consultation.
 - Strengthen the Action Plan to ensure consistency between the Executive Summary, sport specific assessments and site_level actions, and to clearly reflect identified priorities.
 - Review the prioritisation of sites with multiple 'Poor' or 'Standard' quality facilities to ensure alignment with evidenced need, strategic role and comparative investment levels.
 - Ensure all relevant existing facilities, including school based outdoor courts and pitches, are accurately captured within the Action Plan where they contribute to current or future provision.
 - Reinforce the role of schools and education sites as potential community sports hubs, where appropriate, supported by phased delivery, feasibility work and sustainable management models.
 - Continue to promote a 'Protect, Enhance and Provide' approach, with particular emphasis on improving quality and capacity where deficiencies are most acute.
 - Use the PPOSS as a live evidence base to support funding bids, developer contribution negotiations and partnership working with National Governing Bodies, Town and Parish Councils and other stakeholders.

10 Conclusion

- 10.1 The survey findings reflect positively on the PPOSS and provide some very useful feedback that has been considered and where feasible included in the updated reports.
- 10.2 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.
- 11.3 The survey results indicate partners can and are willing 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.
- 11.4 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.

12 Financial Comments / Implications

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 Any proposal for new provision would be accompanied by a robust business plan so the financial implications are fully understood.
- 12.3 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.

13 Legal Comments/Implications

- 13.1 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.
- 13.2 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.

14 Risk Implications

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 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.
- 14.4 The level of future income / grant opportunities may be limited; and/or priorities for spending on strategic projects could lie elsewhere.

15 Equality Implications (Public Sector Equality Duty)

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 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.

16 HR and Workforce Implications

16.1 There are no HR implications identified in this report.

17 Community Safety Implications (Crime and Disorder)

17.1 There are no Community Safety implications identified in this report.

18 Climate Change Implications

18.1 There are no Climate Change implications linked to the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, however individual projects that come forward may have elements that would need to be reflected on at the appropriate time.

19 Health & Safety implications

19.1 There are no Health and Safety implications linked to this report.

Health & Wellbeing Implications

19.2 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 to ensure that the wellbeing of residents is provided for.

20 Procurement and Social Value implications

20.1 The [Public Services \(Social Value\) Act](#) came into force on 31 January 2013. The Act requires public authorities to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their area.

- Consult with the Community: This project has seen extensive engagement with a large assortment of stakeholders including sports clubs and organisations, to gather input on the quantity, quality and accessibility of facilities for formal sports provision across East Devon. The recent consultation on the findings reflects that approach
- Ensure Accessibility: This was one of the key criteria when assessing sites as part of the study and where improvements could be made
- Foster Social Inclusion: Create spaces within playing pitches and open spaces that encourage social interaction and community engagement.

21 Land and Buildings (non-housing)/Asset Management Implications

21.1 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.

22 Overview and Scrutiny Committees Comments/Recommendations

22.1 Subject to approval at Forum, this will be submitted with comments from the Forum within the Cabinet Report.

23 Digital and Data

23.1 There are no Digital and Data implications linked to this report.

24 Consultation and Engagement

24.1 The main body of the report reflects on the latest consultation carried out in this project.

25 Communications

25.1 Once the PPOSS strategy and Action plan is approved, it will be readily available on the council website. A press release will be distributed at the appropriate time along with an update in the members and Town / Parish Council correspondence. It will also be promoted to sports clubs and organisations.

26 Next Steps

26.1 The completion of the project focuses on the;

- Production of the Draft Playing Pitch and Open Space Strategy (Appendix 2)
- Production of the Draft Playing Pitch and Open Space Action Plan. (Appendix 3)
- Basis for consultation prior to formal adoption by Cabinet and by Full Council.
- Application and delivery of the strategy

26.2 Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS), Executive Summary and Action Plan were all updated following feedback from the consultation.

26.3 The Executive Summary and Action Plan are contained within Appendices 2 and 3 of this report. The more detailed Strategy document is also available on request.

26.4 The Cabinet report will confirm the approach for facility needs that 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.

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

o **ENHANCE** existing facilities through improving their quality, accessibility and / or management.

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

o **PROVIDE** new or larger facilities that are fit for purpose to meet demands for participation now and in the future.

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

26.5 The breakdown of the actions set out in the January 2026 report will be updated and included within the Cabinet paper.

- 26.6 The District Council focus will primarily focus on short term plan due to the pending outcomes of the Local Government Review.
- 26.7 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.
- 26.8 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.

27 Appendices

- 27.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation Report
27.2 Appendix 2 – POSS Executive Summary
27.3 Appendix 3 – Site Specific Action Plan

28 Background Papers

- Previous updates to the Forum –
- January 2026 - [PPS - Report Jan 26.pdf](#)