

Adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	21 May 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Nigel Foot
Report Author:	Drew McHenry
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4737

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To propose the adoption of the final Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) 2026-2041, including the Executive Summary and Appendices.
- 1.2 The draft strategy was publicly consulted on at the end of 2025 and consultation feedback was gathered and used to produce the final strategy. This final strategy is supported by the PPS Steering Group, consisting of Sport England, National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and officers. The delivery of the PPS actions will be undertaken through the collaboration of the steering group.
- 1.3 The full PPS pack recommended for publication includes a range of documents to accompany the main strategy, that provide additional detail, and guidance.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To adopt the final Playing Pitch Strategy 2026-2041.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary				
Financial:	The available PPS capital budget (85199) is detailed below.				
		25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
	85199 (PPS)	£193,510	£300,000	£500,000	£500,000
	Total	£193,510	£300,000	£500,000	£500,000

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Human Resource:	The delivery of the strategy will be undertaken within existing resources
Legal:	None
Risk Management:	None
Property:	None
Policy:	<p>The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the requirement of Local Authorities to establish and provide adequate and proper leisure facilities to meet local needs. The Playing Pitch Strategy forms part of the requirement.</p> <p>The Playing Pitch Strategy has been developed with reference to the West Berkshire Local Plan, Football Foundation's Local Football Facility Plan and Sport England's Playing Field Policy.</p>

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		

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Environmental Impact:		X		
Health Impact:	X			If the strategy is adopted, and actions are undertaken as part of the live delivery plan, there will be increased availability of pitches and courts for residents to exercise.
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			<p>Thriving communities with a strong local voice.</p> <p>This priority will be supported by the adoption of the new PPS, as the data will be accurate and robust and therefore provide an up-to-date evidence base to support actions in improving leisure availability and quality.</p> <p>Provision under the PPS will improve the local sports infrastructure and, thereby, contribute to supporting the health and wellbeing of the population of West Berkshire.</p> <p><u>Leisure strategy</u></p> <p>1.3. Work across the Council to improve use and accessibility of leisure activities, facilities and greenspace;</p>
Core Business:		X		
Data Impact:		X		
Consultation and Engagement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public consultation undertaken from 19 November 2025 to 04 January 2026 			

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PPS Steering Group (WBC officers including Leisure, Countryside and Planning, Sport England, NGB's for all named sports)• Consultation with pitch and court users and holders
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 West Berkshire has an ageing population, and it is crucial that health is maintained throughout residents' lifetimes. Increasing uptake in physical activity supports this as a preventative measure. A Playing Pitch Strategy gives the Council a clear approach to the provision of additional and improved pitches and courts to enable residents more access to active leisure spaces. Evidence suggests that West Berkshire adult residents are less inactive than CIPFA neighbours and require spaces to exercise. Equally, improved availability of pitches and courts will support children and young people in reducing inactivity levels. This is vital for physical, social and mental wellbeing.
- 4.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) has been commissioned by West Berkshire Council to understand the existing and future demand on pitches and courts in the district.
- 4.3 The PPS relates to football, rugby union, hockey, cricket, tennis, netball and lacrosse provision and is the result of detailed investigation and analysis supported by a Steering Group which has included the National Governing Bodies for Sport (NGBs) and Sport England, as well as pitch and court holders and users. The Portfolio Holder will attend the PPS Steering Group meetings going forward.
- 4.4 The strategy provides evidence and recommendations for the Council to strategically plan the provision of pitches and courts for current and future demand, until 2041.
- 4.5 The Draft PPS was subject to public consultation undertaken from 19 November 2025 – 04 January 2026. Over three hundred responses were received and the strategy has been amended to provide additional clarification on the recommendations. However, the final strategy has not changed materially compared to the consultation draft. The final strategy has been supported by the PPS Steering Group.
- 4.6 It is proposed that the final strategy is adopted from 2026-2041. A PPS live delivery plan is being developed which will be managed by officers and members of the PPS Steering Group through PPS Stage E (delivery, monitoring and review). The PPS live delivery plan will be created using the detailed recommendations and data derived from the PPS process.
- 4.7 This delivery plan will be available for viewing on the council website and will be updated by officers following steering group meetings, or when actions are completed. The full PPS steering group will work towards completing the actions during the PPS lifespan (2026-2041), as opportunities arise.
- 4.8 The Playing Pitch Strategy will provide recommendations to allow officers and members of the PPS Steering Group to implement actions based on a robust evidence base. The

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PPS lists recommendations against three sub-groups; Protect, Enhance and Provide, to suggest actions to increase the availability and quality of pitch and court leisure facilities in the district.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) has been prepared to understand the existing and future demand of pitches and courts in the district in accordance with the PPS framework. Further to public consultation, the final strategy is now recommended for adoption.

Background

5.2 The previous PPS was adopted in February 2020, and a Stage E Review (update of data) was undertaken in January 2022.

5.3 A Playing Pitch Strategy is recommended as part of the National Planning Policy and follows guidelines set out by Sport England. The process involves data analysis of pitches, courts and ancillary facilities and feedback from users to produce recommendations on facility provision within the district.

5.4 The strategy relates to football, rugby union, hockey, cricket, tennis, netball and lacrosse provision and is the result of detailed investigation and analysis supported by a Steering Group of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Sport England, as well as pitch and court holders and users. The strategy outlines the views of these groups across the district and is supported by data including usage figures to give an accurate, detailed overview of sport in West Berkshire. The strategy provides evidence and recommendations to enable the Council to strategically plan the provision of pitches and courts for current and future demand, until 2041 although this will be subject to a refresh of the data when required.

5.5 The Playing Pitch Strategy provides the Council with an evidence-based live delivery plan, to provide the best opportunities for leisure and sport within the district, with regard to pitches and court spaces.

5.6 The live delivery plan will be monitored by the Steering Group with each party being responsible for completing assigned actions and updating the group. The actions are directed from the full recommendations of the PPS, as a non-ordered list.

5.7 The strategy is divided into the categories of Protect, Enhance and Provide, each with their own focussed strategies, to protect the sites currently available for use, enhance where improvements can be made and provide new facilities.

5.8 The Playing Pitch Strategy provides a 'direction of travel' for the Council, rather than an exact blueprint, to allow for adaptations to be made where appropriate, due to the dynamic nature of planning.

Key strategy headlines (please refer to Appendix 2 – Glossary, if required)

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- 5.9 Detailed recommendations are included in background document 1, which offers a more extensive review of the Strategy and details specific sites for improvement, following the PPS structure of 'Protect, Enhance, Provide'.
- (a) Protect - A key theme, across all sports, is to protect sites that are already used as pitches and courts. Recommendations include securing tenure of existing sites and protecting headroom on surplus pitches for future use, when demand arises. Recommendations are also focussed on opening up facilities for community use and ensuring booking is accessible and straightforward for users.
 - (b) Enhance - The strategy also focusses on enhancing existing sites across the sports, with recommendations to improve poor quality pitches and ancillary facilities that are not up to standard. The latter is vital in increasing accessibility to sport for the rising number of girls' and women's teams.
 - (c) Provide – Additionally, the strategy proposes new facilities including grass and artificial grass pitches (AGPs), new ancillary facilities and floodlighting to increase the availability of training hours during the week.
- 5.10 Data demonstrates that there is currently a deficit of 7.4 3G football pitches across the district, rising to 9.7 by 2041. The placement of these is recommended to be spread evenly throughout the three sub-areas (detailed in the strategy), with key new sites being named but not ordered, as Henwick Worthy, Faraday Road, St. Bartholomew's School, Trinity School, Kennet School, The Downs School and Theale Green School.
- 5.11 It is also recommended that the availability of grass football pitches across the various age ranges and sizes is increased, though some of this demand would be met through any introduction of 3G pitches.
- 5.12 The strategy recommends that rugby union will need to see an increase of 2.51 grass pitches across the district by 2041.
- 5.13 Additionally, it is recommended that hockey will require two additional lit AGPs across Newbury and Thatcham, one to be built at Henwick Worthy, the other to be met through improvement to an existing pitch through sports lighting.
- 5.14 It is also recommended that cricket will require an additional 107 grass wickets, or 9 artificial wickets.
- 5.15 Netball recommendations are to work with providers in offering ease of booking and ensuring facilities, including ancillary buildings, are up to standard.
- 5.16 Specific tennis recommendations are to make courts more accessible to the public, which recent works to Henwick Worthy courts and Kennet School courts contribute to, and to also provide padel facilities.
- 5.17 Recommendations for Lacrosse are to work with St Bartholomew's school to increase accessibility for the sport as this is the only location offering lacrosse facilities.

Key changes following consultation

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5.18 Public Consultation on the PPS draft was helpful in highlighting the demand from residents for spaces to participate in sport throughout the district, further supporting the need for the PPS. Many comments reflected the recommendations of the PPS draft, in demonstrating the requirement for additional pitches at specific sites and improvements to be made throughout the district. A summary of the public consultation responses is attached as Appendix 7.9. The strategy is unchanged materially from the draft strategy, with only minor updates and changes resulting from the consultation. This was expected, due to the extensive data gathering at the start of the PPS process.

5.19 The key changes following consultation are:

- (a) Minor wording changes to widen the interpretation of the meaning of 'ancillary' to cover 'supporting infrastructure'.
- (b) A reference in the strategy document to the importance of clubhouses playing a key role in helping to sustain the viability of clubs.
- (c) An additional recommendation under 'Provide - All sports', to the effect that clubs and pitch provision should be supported by the relevant and necessary type, size and composition of supporting infrastructure such as changing facilities to meet the needs of the teams and players using the sites / grounds.
- (d) An additional sentence in the football recommendations around the requirement for new 3G pitches to be on the FA pitch register, which was previously deemed as understood.

Proposals

5.20 This report seeks to outline the process that has led to the final PPS being created, including public consultation, and seeks approval to adopt the final strategy.

6 Other options considered

6.1 No other options were considered as the Playing Pitch Strategy must be updated following the Sport England guidelines. The current PPS is outdated, and the new strategy has been produced supported by evidence.

7 Appendices and Background Documents

7.1 Strategy Document

7.2 Executive Summary

7.3 Appendix 1 – FAQs

7.4 Appendix 2 – Glossary

7.5 Appendix 3 – Exploring Decarbonisation, Sustainable Travel and Climate Change

7.6 Background Document 1 – Detailed Recommendations

7.7 Background Document 2 – Guidance for LA Officers

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7.8 Background Document 3 – Maps Informing the Assessment

7.9 Consultation Summary

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position:

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

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