
Agenda Item:	Sports Pitches Update
Meeting Date:	Monday, 9 March 2026
Contact Officer:	Head of Estates and Operations

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the council's sports grounds, which play a vital role in supporting physical activity, grassroots sport, and community health. It highlights the football season and also shares the exciting news of cricket returning to The Leys. The council's facilities cater to football, cricket, bowls, splash park, skatepark, and general public recreation. Proper maintenance of these amenities is essential to ensure safe play, sustain participation levels, and maximise pitch availability.

Background

Recent reports from the Football Association indicate that many sports pitches across the UK are rated as poor or average quality, with roughly two-thirds of grass pitches considered substandard.

Common issues affecting pitch quality include poor drainage, uneven surfaces, waterlogging, overuse, and inadequate maintenance.

The council currently manages four sports grounds providing a total of twenty football pitches of varying sizes, regularly used by seven local football clubs. All grounds are maintained and renovated by the council's in-house maintenance team.

Current Situation

Between September 2025 and March 2026, the Town Council facilitated a total of 385 football matches across the following grounds:

- West Witney: 200
- Burwell: 113
- The Leys: 54
- King George V: 18

Despite an exceptionally wet winter, with rainfall 150% above average, officers have continued to plan proactively to minimise match cancellations. Maintaining strong relationships with football clubs remains a priority, supported by weekly communications and feedback mechanisms.

During this period, 122 matches were cancelled due to pitch conditions:

- The Leys: 58
- West Witney: 29
- Burwell: 27
- King George V: 27

The council continues to carry out seasonal maintenance to ensure pitches remain safe and playable. This includes line marking, overseeding, top dressing, scarification, surface repairs, and turf replacement.

Cricket returning to The Leys

Witney Mills Cricket Club has approached the council to use The Leys for their third and fourth teams. Officers are keen to support this request, as it aligns with the council's objectives, and are currently undertaking the standard procedures, including establishing a pitch letting agreement and reviewing the risk assessments provided by the club.

The council's maintenance team will increase their focus on the cricket square and outfield to ensure the grounds are prepared. It is anticipated that approximately nine cricket matches will take place at The Leys between May and September 2026.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality - increasing participation, reducing discrimination, ensuring fair opportunities, and creating inclusive environments, which helps the sports grow and benefit communities.
- b) Biodiversity - integrating biodiversity into sports grounds management supports environmental sustainability while maintaining high-quality playing surfaces.
- c) Crime & Disorder - Sports ground activities help minimise crime and disorder by providing structured activities, promoting discipline and respect, increasing supervision, and strengthening community engagement.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - Climate change and environmental factors impact sports grounds by causing extreme weather, flooding, and drought, which damage pitches, increase maintenance costs, and disrupt sporting activities.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Update only.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial implications

Update only.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.