
Agenda Item:	Sports Pitches
Meeting Date:	Monday 1 June 2026
Contact Officer:	Head of Estates & Operations

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on sports pitches, and projects relating to them owned and maintained by the Town Council.

Current Situation

Football Pitch Maintenance

Annual maintenance of the Council's sports pitches is currently taking place with pitches being aerated, top-dressed and overseeded at The Leys, Burwell, West Witney and King George V sports grounds. The Operations Manager procured the supply of top dressing and seed and organised for the local ground maintenance contractors to distribute across the council's grounds.

STRI will be attending in August to undertake their audit and provide a detailed report to the Council on the condition on the pitches including any recommendations.

Windrush Place Sports Pitches: A pitch assessment requested by WTC and organised by the consortium reported the pitches are in good condition and fit for purpose. The report stated when comparing the results of this audit against Sport England Guidance, both Pitches pass all relevant Performance Quality Standards (PQS).

Officers have attended the site with District Council officers, the developer and Oxfordshire FA to assess the condition of the pitches prior to transfer from the developers. It was discovered that although the report confirms the pitches meet Sport England PQS standards, their thinning and patchy condition observed during the recent site visit raised concerns about whether the reported grass coverage accurately reflects current conditions. Given the pitches have been unused for over 3 years, the Town Council would have expected denser, more uniform coverage. The Head of Estates and Operations has requested information from the consortium to help understand whether the current condition reflects the intended establishment standard and whether any additional works should be considered before handover. The Oxfordshire FA has also been asked to provide professional guidance.

Overlap of Cricket & Football Seasons

Historically, the local football season runs from 1 September to 30 April, with the cricket season taking place from 1 May to 31 August.

Officers worked in partnership with the football clubs to extend the season prior to the start of renovation works, helping to manage a backlog of fixtures. The Council accommodated an additional 22 matches in support of the clubs, who expressed significant appreciation for this assistance.

Officers are also continuing to liaise with the Cricket Club to support planning for their final home fixture of the season, scheduled for the last weekend of September.

Bowls Greens

The Council's new Operations Manager is working collaboratively with the three bowls clubs to drive continuous improvement in maintenance and renovation planning. Officers have been carefully coordinating maintenance schedules to ensure sufficient time is available for green upkeep while minimising disruption to the clubs' fixture programmes. Equipment and training requirements are also being kept under review to ensure both Council and club standards are consistently met.

Feedback from the clubs on the condition of the greens has been positive, with particular appreciation expressed for the increased level of communication and engagement.

Cricket Pitches

Although it was hoped that the Leys Cricket wicket would be used this season, no users have come forward to date. As a result, the cricket square is currently being maintained at a reduced level, which can be enhanced should a club or user be identified.

The start of the cricket season has presented some challenges due to the refurbishment works at the West Witney clubhouse. Officers have worked closely with the cricket club to identify practical solutions, including arranging and securing alternative venues for the club's first two fixtures.

The cricket club are really pleased with the condition of the West Witney cricket square following the completion of pre-season renovations.

Basketball Courts

At budget-setting, the Council agreed to support improvements to basketball provision in Witney. Officers have since met with Witney Wolves Basketball Club to discuss requirements for the hard court at King George's Field, as well as longer-term aspirations for the court adjacent to Windrush Leisure Centre.

Officers are also engaging with Oxfordshire County Council regarding a wider collaborative project relating to the Windrush Leisure Centre court, for which no Town Council budget has currently been allocated.

A further report will be brought to the Committee when progress permits.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

2. An Engaged & Supported Community

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 - Maintaining and operating good quality sports pitches has a positive effect by promoting inclusive access to recreation, physical activity and community participation for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- b) Biodiversity - Good quality sports pitches have both positive and manageable biodiversity impacts. Well-managed green spaces contribute to urban green infrastructure, support soil health, and assist with surface water drainage.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Has a positive impact on crime and disorder by providing safe, accessible and structured recreational opportunities for residents, particularly young people.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency - Green open spaces contribute to carbon capture, urban cooling and natural drainage, while supporting healthier local environments and encouraging outdoor physical activity.

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.

Failure to maintain and operate good quality sports pitches could result in deteriorating facilities, increased health and safety risks, reduced participation in sport and physical activity, and reputational damage to the Council. Poor quality or unavailable pitches may limit opportunities for local clubs and residents, negatively impacting community wellbeing and inclusion. Inadequate maintenance could also lead to higher long-term repair costs, loss of external funding opportunities, reduced income generation and increased complaints from users and stakeholders.

Social Value

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

The maintenance and operation of good quality sports pitches deliver social value by supporting community health, wellbeing and social cohesion. Accessible and well-maintained facilities provide opportunities for residents of all ages and backgrounds to participate in sport, recreation and organised community activities, helping to encourage active lifestyles, reduce social isolation and strengthen community engagement.

Financial implications

- The work on maintenance is funded from pre-defined budgets.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and updates.