

West Berkshire Council

PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

2024 - 2041

Produced by:  **Stuart Todd Associates**
planning | policy | strategy | partnership

Produced for:  **West Berkshire**
COUNCIL

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) for West Berkshire covers the period to 2041 and is compliant with the most up-to-date Sport England guidance¹. At its heart has been close liaison between the consultants commissioned to develop the strategy (Stuart Todd Associates), West Berkshire Council, National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Sport England, while consultation with clubs, operators, owners and providers of pitches and courts has been critical to understanding the needs of sports.

The strategy covers grass and artificial pitches used for football, rugby union, hockey, cricket and lacrosse and outdoor courts used for tennis and netball.

A PPS serves multiple functions across sport, leisure, planning and public health. It supports not only formal club-based sport but also social, casual and informal sport, encouraging broader participation and increased physical activity. It provides an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of playing pitches, establishes the current levels of demand (and therefore whether pitches are being over or under used) and identifies future levels of demand to the end of the strategy period. In doing so, it seeks to ensure that the appropriate level of pitch provision is aligned with both current needs and anticipated growth, enabling effective long-term planning.

The Playing Pitch Strategy plays the following roles:



1. Evidence base

- Provides robust evidence to protect existing provision in the planning system, helping to defend against inappropriate loss of pitches and courts.



2. Quality

- Helps identify improvements to quality and condition of pitches, courts and ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as clubhouses, changing facilities, pavilions, sports-lighting, dugouts, etc.).



3. Future Provision

- Provides a strategic view and options for the provision of pitches during the strategy period.



4. Investment

- Informs the investment to be made into club sites.
- Can be used to support funding applications for improvements to quality, quantity and accessibility.



5. Development

- Informs the planning of new developments and on/off-site contributions for pitches and courts, ensuring they are consistent with national and local policy.



6. Planning Policy

- Informs planning policy development.



7. Health and Wellbeing

- Forms an important part of the “package” of strategies, evidence and actions which can contribute towards improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those who live and work in the area.

¹ See https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/planning-sport?section=assessing_needs_and_playing_pitch_strategy_guidance

What the strategy does not and cannot do is provide a blueprint for change to 2041. The strategy can present options based on evidence and assessment of it (and indeed recommendations), but cannot do the work necessary (for example, logistical, feasibility and viability work) required to confirm actions with 100% certainty and make things happen “on the ground”, which is the task of the many stakeholders (such as clubs, providers, owners and managers of pitches) and organisations (such as the Council, sports governing bodies and Sport England) responsible for delivery of pitches and ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as clubhouses, changing facilities, pavilions, sports-lighting, dugouts, etc.).

Without regular monitoring and review of its recommendations during stage E (the delivery stage), the strategy could be considered out-of-date in around 5 years time.

The strategy’s Vision is as follows.

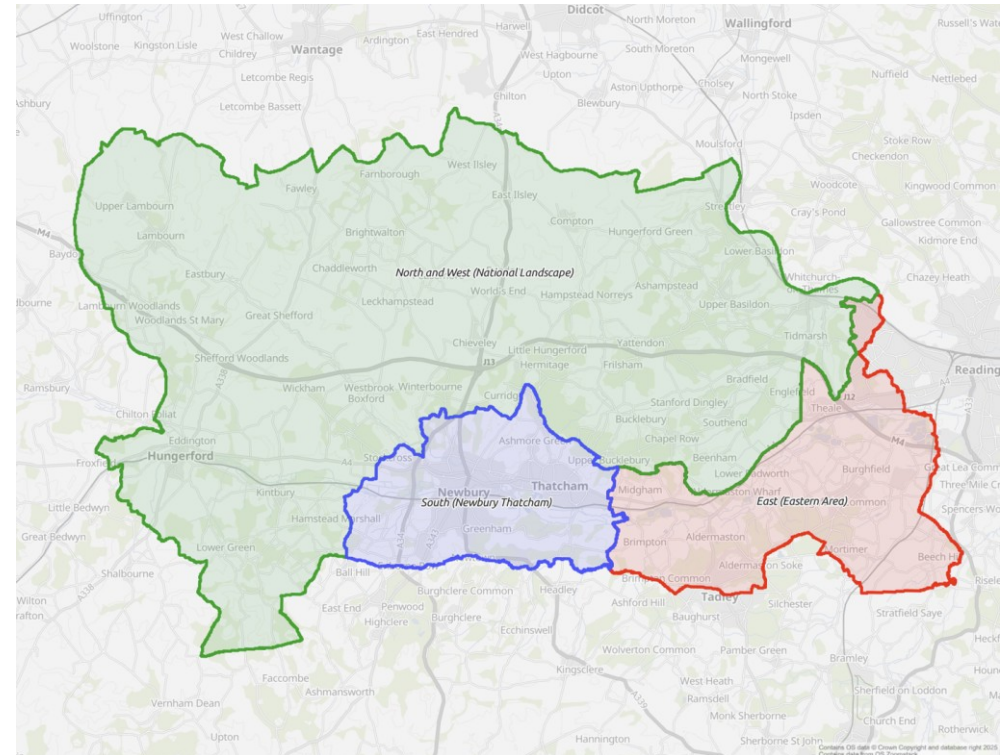
Vision

“The PPS seeks to support the Council and its partners in the creation of an accessible, high quality and sustainable network of sports pitches and other outdoor sports facilities which supports increased sports participation by all residents, at all levels of play, from grassroots to elite.”

The study area for the PPS is the whole of the West Berkshire Council (WBC) area, as shown below (Figure 1). The map also shows the sub-areas used for analysis and presentation of the strategy’s

recommendations and actions. These sub-areas align with the areas used for planning policy purposes.

Figure 1: The Study Area and Sub-Areas



This PPS is a strategy for pitch sports. While the development of the strategy was commissioned by West Berkshire Council (and therefore “ownership” of the strategy rests principally with the local authority), this does not mean that all recommendations must be delivered solely by the Council. Delivery is the responsibility of all members of the steering group, and also of other key stakeholders such as (but not limited to) clubs, providers, operators and land owners.

This strategy document is intentionally brief, structured as follows:



Assessment Summary

- Baseline data: the position now
- Looking forward: identifying key issues from the assessment



Strategic Priorities

- Headline priorities providing the main focus of the strategy's direction.



Delivering the strategy

- Strategic recommendations and Action Plan Priorities



Appendices and Background Documents

- Appendix 1 sets out further details about the process which has been followed to develop this PPS in a “Frequently Asked Questions” format.
- Appendix 2 is the PPS Glossary.
- Appendix 3 explores decarbonisation and climate change issues.
- Background Document 1 sets out the strategy's detailed “Protect”, “Enhance” and “Provide” recommendations for the local authority area, sub-areas and specific sites for each sport.
- Background Document 2 sets our guidance for local authority officers on use of the PPS.
- Background Document 3 sets-out maps which have informed the PPS.

2. ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

2.1 Setting the Scene: Key Basic Data

The summary of current supply and demand data for each main pitch sport follows and sets the position for pitch sports in West Berkshire now. “Headline data” only are provided to give brief context. Maps showing the locations of pitches and courts are set-out in Background Document 3.

Baseline data was collected in the 2024/25 season. It is recognised that basic data changes from season to season. The Steering Group overseeing delivery of the strategy will monitor change and its impact over time.

Football

In the WBC area, based on Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Football Association (BBFA) affiliation data and updated with club survey responses in the 2024/25 season suggests that there were a total of 392 teams, of which 65 are adult teams. Of these adult teams, 8 are ladies teams 53 are men’s teams (1 of which is a veterans’ side) and 4 are walking football sides. There are 327 youth and junior / mini teams (U7-U18), of which 53 are girls’ teams). Within this figure, U7-U10 teams account for 121 teams. There are 6 disability teams across all age groups.

In West Berkshire, the largest clubs (with around 20 teams or more), based on data provided for the 2024/25 season, are:

- Barton Rovers FC (32 teams)
- Hungerford Town Juniors (23)
- Burghfield (51)
- Thatcham Tornados (48)
- Cold Ash Boys and Girls (26)
- Westwood Wanderers (35)

- CSA 07 Youth (20)

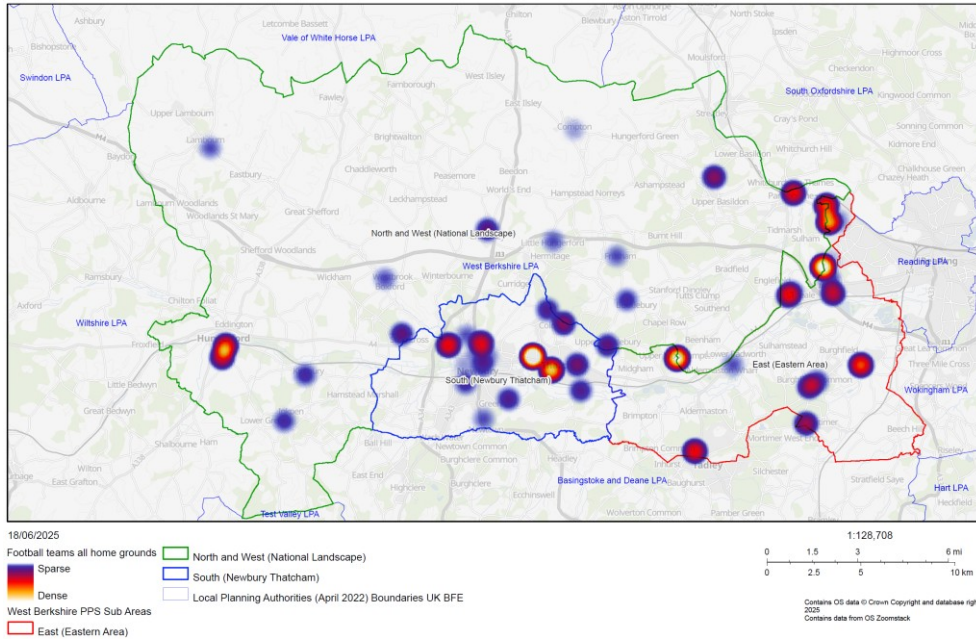
The breakdown of team numbers data by affiliation age group and sub-area is as follows.

Sub-area	Number of Teams					
	Team Age Group and Format					
	U7/U8*	U9/U10	U11/U12	U13/U18	Adult^	Total
North and West	20	18	27	43	13	121
South	24	29	15	44	19	131
East	12	18	26	51	33	140
West Berkshire	56	65	68	138	65	392
<i>Outside of WBC area**</i>	14	16	16	5	5	56

Notes: does not include Tadley Cavella FC teams given that, although they play within the WBC area, they relate more closely to Tadley in the Basingstoke and Dean local authority area. * does not include U5/U6 development teams, of which there are 3 in East, 1 in North and West and 2 in South. There is 1 exported / displaced outside of WBC. ** exported / displaced demand. ^ Including U19s and Veterans’ teams, but not including walking football teams.

Figure 2 shows a heat map for team numbers and locations of home grounds in the WBC area, suggesting that the highest demand is focused around main centres of population.

Figure 2: Heat Map showing Numbers of Teams by Home Ground Location



The number of pitches by size and security of community use, not including overmarked pitches, is as follows.

Sub-area	Number of Grass Pitches				
	Pitch Size (pitches currently in use)				
	5v5	7v7	9v9	11v11 (youth)	11v11 (adult)
North and West	3	4	9	8	8
South	7	7	7	8	10
East	2	4	5	5	21
West Berkshire	12	15	21	21	39

Sub-area	Number of Grass Pitches					
	Total pitch numbers currently in use	Of which are		Avail. for use but not used	Not available *	Dis-used
		Secure	Unsecure			
North and West	32	2	30	19	23	0
South	39	18	21	19	12	1
East	37	7	30	24	24	0
West Berkshire	108	27	81	62	59	1

Notes: * for community use (i.e. accessible for clubs to use)

Considering the current picture of supply and demand on grass pitches currently used by clubs, figures suggest that 9v9 and youth 11v11 pitches in particular see overplay across the district, suggesting a need to make-up that deficit.

The following table sets out the number of 3G AGP by sub-area and size and sand based AGPs which are used for informal football use as well as for hockey (i.e. have community use). It should be noted that the FA sanctions matches and prefers training for clubs on 3G pitches. 2 x 3Gs are on the FA 3G Register, formally sanctioned for competitive football matches (affiliated for FA and FIFA football). Of these numbers, there are 4 AGPs with secure community use 2 of which are 3Gs) and 6 which have unsecure community use.

Sub-area	Type	Size*				Of which are	
		11v11	9v9	7v7	5v5	Sports-lit	FA Register ²
North and West	3G	1	0	0	0	1	1
	Sand	0	0	0	0	0	-
South	3G	1	0	0	0	1	0
	Sand	4	0	1	0	5	-
East	3G	1	0	0	0	1	1
	Sand	1	0	1	0	1	-
West Berkshire	3G	3	0	0	0	3	2
	Sand	5	0	2	0	6	-

* pitches slightly smaller than recommended dimensions are included. E.g. a pitch measuring slightly smaller than a 7v7 is included in figures for 7v7 pitches.

Rugby union

In West Berkshire (in the WBC area) in the 2024/25 season there were 5 Rugby Football Union (RFU) voting (affiliated) clubs, as follows:

- Aldermaston RFC
- Tadley RFC
- Hungerford RFC
- Thatcham RFC
- Newbury RFC

Between them the make-up of teams across the sub-areas, based on RFU affiliation data, are as follows.

Rugby	North and West	South	East	Totals
Adult Ladies	0	1	0	1
Adult Men	2	6	3	11
Age Grade (Girls U13-U18)	0	1	0	1
Age Grade (Boys U13-U18)	4	9	5	18
Age Grade Mixed (U7-U12)	6	10	6	22
Totals	12	27	14	53

At club home grounds, there are the following numbers of senior pitches (based on pitches with posts installed, but not including informal training grids).

Club	Sub-area	Sports-lit Pitches (fixed lighting)	Full-size Pitches (total, including sports-lit)
Aldermaston RFC	East	0	2
Tadley RFC		1	3
Hungerford RFC	North and West	1	4
Newbury RFC	South	2	4
Thatcham RFC		0	2
West Berkshire		4	15

There are no (0) World Rugby 22 compliant 3G pitches in the WBC area.

² See <https://footballfoundation.org.uk/3g-pitch-register>

Hockey

In the 2024/25 season, there were 2 hockey clubs (HC) which have a home ground within the WBC area, as follows.

Club Name	Site Name (Home Ground)	Sub Area
Newbury and Thatcham HC	Henwick Worthy, Thatcham	South
Scarlet Runners Ladies HC	Elstree School (matches) / Willink Leisure Centre (training)	East

Clubs have the following numbers of teams, based on 2024/25 data.

Category	East (Scarlett Runners HC)	South (Newbury and Thatcham HC)	Totals
Adult Ladies	1	5	6
Adult Men	0	6	6
Vets Ladies	0	1	1
Vets Men	0	0	0
Informal / friendly only	0	1	1
Back to Hockey	0	1	1
Flyerz (disability)	0	1	1
Walking Hockey	0	0	0
Boys 14-16	0	0	0
Girls 14-16	0	3	3
Boys 11-13	0	2	2
Girls 11-13	0	1	1
Mixed 5-10	0	1	1
Totals	1	22	23

Cricket

There are 23 clubs that played and have a home ground in the WBC area.

East	North and West	South
AWE Tadley CC	Bradfield CC	Cold Ash & Ashmore Green CC
Bucklebury CC	Chaddleworth CC	Donnington CC
Mortimer & West End CC	Chieveley CC	Falkland CC
Sulhamstead & Ufton CC	Englefield CC	Newbury CC
Theale & Tilehurst CC	Hampstead Norreys CC	Thatcham Town CC
	Hungerford CC	
	Inkpen CC	
	Purley on Thames CC	
	Swindon Titans CC	
	The Bell Inn Aldworth CC	
	Welford Park CC	
	West Isley CC	
	Yattendon & Frilsham CC	

Clubs have the following numbers of teams that play cricket in the WBC area, based on 2024 data.

Cricket	East	North & West	South	Totals
Adult Men (Open)	27	46	23	96
Adult Women	2	6	5	9
Junior Boys (open) - (7-18)	14	24	27	65
Junior Girls (open) - (7-18)	7	5	10	22
Totals	50	81	65	196

There are 26 cricket grounds that use grass pitches with community usage in West Berkshire (WBC area). Within these there are 5 artificial pitches. There are a further 4 standalone artificial pitches which are grounds without any grass pitches and are available for community use. There are only 14 sites that don't have secure community usage.

A breakdown of all the pitches across the sub areas are:

Sub-area	Number of Cricket Grounds and Pitches			
	Grass Grounds		Non-Turf Pitches	
	Adult	Junior	Stand-alone	On Grass Pitch
East	8	0	1	0
North & West	12	0	2	4
SouthClick or tap here to enter text.	6	0	1	1
West Berkshire	26	0	4	5

Tennis

In the WBC area, based on Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) affiliation data and updated with club survey responses, there are a total of 2,471 members. The largest clubs are located in Pangbourne (311 members), Cold Ash (300), Bucklebury (299) and Bradfield (256).

Sub Area	Club Name	No. of members
East	Douai Park Tennis Club	104
North and West	Boxford Tennis Club	112
	Bradfield Tennis Centre	256
	Bucklebury Tennis Club	299
	Chieveley Tennis Club	165
	Kintbury Tennis Club	127
	Purley (Berks) Tennis Club	120
	Hungerford Tennis Club	165
	Pangbourne Tennis Club	311
	Basildon Tennis Club	137
Yattendon and Frilsham TC	105	
South	Newbury Tennis Club	150
	Thatcham Tennis Club	120
	Cold Ash Tennis Club	300

There are two LTA-registered public park venues (five courts) and 14 LTA-registered club venues (42 courts) within the WBC area. The remaining, LTA non-registered/non-club sites, are venues that either lack LTA affiliation or hold LTA registration but do not operate as clubs.

A breakdown of all the tennis courts across the sub areas are:

Sub Area	LTA-reg. park/club		LTA non-reg./non-club		Totals
	Lit courts	Non-lit courts	Lit courts	Non-lit courts	
East	0	8	12	16	36
North and West	19	11	6	25	61
South	7	4	14	28	53
West Berkshire	26	23	32	69	150

Netball

The EN-affiliated club member numbers and venues in the WBC area are:

Sub Area	Venue Name	No. of Members (2024-25)
East	Theale Green School	Thunderbirds NC: 110
	Willink School (Willink LC)	Bowmore NC: 14
South	Kennet School (Kennet LC)	NetballStars: 10
	St Bartholomew's School	Academy NC: 65
	St Gabriel's School	Newbury Junior NC: 110

Theale Green School serves as the competition venue for EN member leagues during the 2024–25 season:

- Reading & District Netball League – Saturday: 25 teams (3 divisions)
- Reading & District Netball League – Wednesday: 36 teams (4 divisions)
- Reading & District Netball League – Thursday Social: 8 teams (1 division)

- Theale Green School is also a central venue for Reading Junior Netball Club: (6 teams, 1 division) and Reading Social League.

There are four EN-member club venues and one EN central league venue in the WBC area, totalling 22 courts. The remaining venues, EN non-member venues including commercial, 32 sites totalling 72 courts.

A breakdown of all the netball courts across the sub areas are:

Sub Area	EN member club / central league		EN non-member inc. commercial leagues		Totals
	Lit courts	Non-lit courts	Lit courts	Non-lit courts	
East	4	4	4	10	22
North and West	0	0	6	22	28
South	12	2	4	26	44
West Berkshire	16	6	14	58	94

Lacrosse

There is one club playing in West Berkshire, playing on a school site, as follows.

Sport	Club	Site Name	Sub Area
Lacrosse	Phoenix Lacrosse Club (Newbury)	St Bartholomew's School	South

2.2 Looking Forward: Identifying Key Issues

Considering all data and information gathered during the PPS process during the 2024/25 season and projecting demand for each sport forwards to 2041 leads to the following key issues arising for each sport. These provide the basis for action which needs to take place to implement the strategy. A detailed site-by-site and place-by-place action plan will be used by the PPS steering group to aid delivery and monitor change.

Football

General

- Making improvements to both grass pitch capacity and ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as clubhouses, changing facilities, sports-lighting, dugouts, etc.) will be key to sustaining and growing the game. Sometimes, even small amounts of funding for a club can make a big difference in improving quality and retaining and attracting players. The presence of social areas / clubhouses at grounds can be important to help sustain the viability of a club(s) or ground.
- Quality and accessibility of provision of both existing and future provision of pitches and facilities must recognise the needs of people with disabilities, girls and women, given continued likely growth in the game for these sectors / formats.
- Pitches with unsecure community use for clubs should be brought into secure community use where possible.
- The network of pitches and ancillary facilities should support clubs to progress up the FA pyramid if they secure promotion.
- Larger housing development sites present an opportunity to deliver multi-pitch / hub sites, particularly grass pitches. Named host, home or operating clubs can be “allocated” to the site to facilitate use and absorb demand from new residents and if there is a shortage of pitch provision and / or pitch capacity in the area. It is important to be aware that additional playing pitches provided on housing allocation sites, or elsewhere, are also likely to require ancillary facilities. For many smaller scale housing developments, off-site financial contributions can help enhance existing pitch and facility provision, for example, improvements to ancillary facilities and the quality of pitches, rather than provision of additional, perhaps single pitch space on-site.
- “Headroom” capacity, where referenced, should not be considered as “surplus” to need or demand or “spare” for disposal. It is simply the result of a calculation comparing supply and demand and does not factor in “reality” issues such as suitability or availability of capacity at appropriate times.
- Data on its own can mask the picture “on the ground” and it could be the case that for both grass and 3G provision, further consideration is needed during stage E of the appropriate locations for improving capacity in relation to clubs which may be currently based in the North and West sub-area but which better relate to the centres of population in the South and East sub-areas. Recommendations with regard to future pitch provision will need to reflect the flexibility needed to apportion additional capacity from one sub-area to another to best reflect clubs’ demands for preferred locations of pitches.

Grass pitches

- Projecting demand forward for grass pitches, across WBC as a whole, with no intervention to improve the quality of the existing supply of pitches which are “poor” and “standard” quality and not maximising use of existing pitches with headroom capacity, demand to 2041 is projected as being for an additional 6.36 (7) x adult / 11v11 pitches, an additional 18 x youth 9v9 or 11v11 pitches and 13 x 5v5 or 7v7 pitches.
- However, making the most of existing supply, for example by maximising use of headroom capacity, using pitches which are available but currently unused and by improving the quality of pitches which are either poor or standard quality to good quality (and thus increasing their carrying capacity to host matches), changes the amount of additional new pitches required, with most pitch sizes having varying degrees of headroom capacity across the local authority area as a whole by 2041. Figures change again when a cap is placed on mini and youth pitches based on kick-off times at weekends and if current exported demand is brought back into the district. The variability of measures open to address current deficit / overplay of provision and accommodate future and exported demand means that a range of pitches is the best lens through which to see how much provision is likely to be necessary by 2041. This range of demand is as follows.

Football Supply / Demand Grass Pitches Snapshot if Quality Solutions can be Maximised		
Sub-area	Pitch Type	Range of demand to 2041 (no. of pitches required / headroom, of “good” quality)
North and West	11v11 adult	3-7 pitches headroom capacity
	11v11 youth and 9v9	6 pitches required – 1 pitch headroom capacity
	7v7 and 5v5	4-5 pitch headroom capacity
South	11v11 adult	3-6 pitches headroom capacity
	11v11 youth and 9v9	7 pitches required – 1 pitch headroom capacity
	7v7 and 5v5	3-7 pitches headroom capacity
East	11v11 adult	1-8 pitches headroom capacity
	11v11 youth and 9v9	5-10 pitches required
	7v7 and 5v5	5-6 pitches headroom capacity

It is important to stress that these figures “do not tell the whole story” with regard to provision. Planning for pitch provision should be done based on additional pitches required as a basis and not be reliant on other factors, for example, improving all less than good quality pitches or assuming that quality improvements automatically means that the additional capacity provided can feasibly or practically be used by teams at the times they need to play matches.

- However, while it is unlikely that all pitches which are poor or standard quality will all be improved and not all pitches with headroom capacity will have availability for use at the time that teams need them, it is clear that the approach to make better use of existing supply should feature as a focus for the strategy. Alongside this, bringing currently unused pitches which are available for community use, into use can also provide a role in

introducing additional supply. Notwithstanding these measures, it is likely that there will be a need for some new additional grass pitches in locations where quality improvements cannot be made, existing headroom capacity cannot be maximised and larger clubs are outgrowing their pitch supply. The detailed site-by-site and place-by-place action plan will be used by the PPS steering group to understand the reality of types of provision needed.

- Changing pitches from one size to another for a season or two could also help to rebalance any deficits in supply and overplay. This will help to maximise existing pitch assets without needing to find land for additional pitches. For example, headroom capacity provided by 11v11 adult, 7v7 and 5v5 pitches available for community use but unused could be reconfigured to help address the deficit in supply to 2041 of 11v11 youth and 9v9 pitches.
- Figures are numerical only. They do not provide the specificity with regards to the “on the ground” availability of pitches and so maximising the use of pitches which have some headroom capacity might not be feasible in reality. This would then mean that there could be a higher number of pitches required in addition to current supply or less capacity available for actual use the figures suggest.

3G pitches

- There is a current deficit of 3G pitches in the district amounting to around 7-8 full-size 11v11 sports-lit pitches. With only 3 full-size sports-lit 3G pitches in supply, there is plenty of football use, including training, taking place on sand-based AGPs and there are indications of significant levels of unmet demand for 3G use.
- Projecting demand forward, just over 2 additional full-size 11v11 sports-lit 3Gs are needed to satisfy additional demand to 2041. This figure include building in anticipated demand arising from the small sided / casual / informal game.

- There is currently around 2.3 pitch’s worth of demand being accommodated on sand-based AGPs. Providing the number of 3G pitches identified in the deficit figure will accommodate this number.

Summary of proposed additional capacity:

3G additional demand to 2041 (WBC area)	Number of 11v11 full-size sports-lit 3G pitches
Existing deficit in supply	7.4
Projected future additional demand including informal / small-sided play “buffer”	2.3
Total required (rounded range)	9-10

- The total number of 9-10 pitches being required is likely to round up to 10 rather than down if, for example, some rugby training needs to be accommodated on weekday evenings for training during the peak of the wet winter months and if on a WR22 compliant 3G pitch.
- The total number of 3G pitches required across the district (rounded) is comprised of the following:
 - 3 in the North and West
 - 3 in the South
 - 4 in the East

These figures are an approximate split between sub-areas, particularly in relation to provision on the edge of the North and West and East sub-areas, where some of the indicated demand is likely to arise in close proximity to Newbury and Thatcham, along the A4 corridor and on the edge of Reading.

- Moving forward, the provision of 3G pitches may continue to need to be supplemented by sand based pitch use, particularly for the casual / informal / small-sided leagues game, while the inter-relationship between sports and multi-sport aspect of both sand

based pitches (with hockey) and 3G (with rugby where WR22 compliant) must be recognised as a strand of the strategy in some locations. A preferred strategy for 3Gs which benefits sport as a whole and residents' access to provision will need co-ordinating with the RFU and EH, as will delivery of additional capacity.

- The sequence of provision of additional 3G capacity is important. For example, provision of 3G capacity in the Thatcham area will help to free-up additional time for Newbury and Thatcham HC to use for weekday evening training at the existing sand AGP if football play can be migrated away from the pitch to a new 3G.

Rugby Union

- Priority issues from the assessment can be summarised as:
 - improving quality of existing pitches as a priority to support existing demand and reduce overplay;
 - ensuring that sports lighting can be provided to enable additional evening use for training in co-ordination with pitch quality improvements;
 - supporting club aspirations to improve the quality and capacity of changing facilities and clubhouses to cater for existing and future demand and to help support growth in the game;
 - exploration of the role that WR22 compliant 3G pitches could play for some clubs to support growth and negate the need for additional grass pitches to be provided; and,
 - if 3G capacity proves not to be an option, how and where best to find additional grass pitch capacity close to existing grounds to cater for demand which ensure club use away from the home ground.
- Pitches which have unsecure community use (Aldermaston RFC and Hungerford RFC) pose a risk to sustaining, improving and

growing the club on the sites, and securing tenure will be an immediate priority for those grounds;

- If measures are taken to improve both the quality of standard quality rated grass pitches and additional sports-lighting is introduced, both measures which can improve the capacity of pitches to accommodate play, on all clubs sites, apart from one (at Newbury RFC), existing deficits in capacity / overplay can be accommodated. This is before factoring additional demand on pitches from club growth to 2041.
- If projected growth comes to fruition, by 2041, an equivalent of an additional 2.51 full-size grass pitches will need to be provided across the WBC area if capacity cannot be accommodated on existing club pitches following improvements to quality and additional sports lighting. Existing grounds at Hungerford RFC and Aldermaston RFC should have sufficient capacity on-site to accommodate future demand if quality and capacity improvements are made. Tadley RFC, Newbury and Thatcham RFCs may need additional grass pitch capacity or access to a WR22 3G for training should future projected growth come forward.
- WR22 compliant 3G pitches are likely to be able to play a role in supporting clubs' demand in some locations, particularly in relation to satisfying training needs in the wettest winter months, if new additional 3Gs in the right locations can be provided to meet the WR22 standard. The RFU's priority is to retain as much play as possible at club home grounds by making improvements to maximise capacity, prior to clubs having to rely on 3G capacity. Therefore, while it is important to recognise the potential role of and need for 3G access for some clubs, 3G provision is not factored into the assessment as a definite solution to accommodate demand which is not yet demonstrable on the ground in most cases.
- The presence of social areas / clubhouses at grounds can be important to help sustain the viability of a club or ground.

Hockey

- There are 2 clubs playing in the WBC area, with a total of 23 teams between them. 22 of these teams are at Newbury and Thatcham HC in the South sub-area), with the other team at Scarlet Runners HC (East sub-area).
- Spatially, most of the district is within a 20 minute drive-time catchment of a full size and or sports-lit sand AGP. Newbury and Thatcham HC uses 3 pitches, with its main home ground at Henwick Worthy, supplemented by Trinity School (matches) (for 2025/26 at least) and a small amount of training at the Downe House School.
- There are no clubs playing in the North and West sub-area, although players living in this area are likely to play either at one of the clubs in WBC or travel to other clubs, for example, based in Swindon or Wallingford. Some players in the eastern part of the District may travel to Reading to play.
- There are opportunities to build on already established Flyerz (disability) and Back to Hockey (informal play) at Newbury and Thatcham HC.
- 3 of the 5 pitches currently used by clubs are considered to have unsecure community use, putting varying degrees of risk for clubs' future certainty of use. A priority for the strategy is likely to be the need to gain greater security of tenure in the long-term for clubs if they continue to have to use these pitches or others with unsecure community use.
- For the future long-term sustainability of hockey clubs (with regard to financial viability and maximising the availability of volunteer / coaches' time) a "one site model" is preferred by England Hockey, focusing club activity on one central site where possible. At the current time, the split of larger clubs playing on more than one site makes this difficult to achieve.
- When comparing current supply and demand on club used pitches, there is notionally headroom capacity to accommodate additional hockey on most pitches, but this not available at the times needed by clubs.
- Key issues for Newbury and Thatcham HC include: the spread of play across 3 pitches, with a preference to consolidate on one 2-pitch site; their lack of time slots at the right times is starting to constrain the ability of the club to sustain and grow; there is shared use of the AGP at Henwick Worthy with football and so this pushes some training to an alternative site; the changing and clubhouse facilities at Henwick Worthy are in need of improvement; and, adding current existing and unmet demand to future demand sees the club needing 2 x full-size sports-lit pitches to accommodate this demand, for matches and training, if it has sole use of these pitches. If a second hockey AGP is delivered at Henwick Worthy, the pitch must demonstrate viability in the long-term from either hockey only use or dual use with football, with hockey needs having priority and should 3G capacity be increased to cater for football.
- Scarlet Runners HC will need additional time slots moving forward, with a total need by 2041 for 2.5 hours at the weekend for matches and 3.5 hours for training on weekday evenings, preferably Monday and Thursday. Their current situation sees them needing additional training time, but this is difficult with much of the rest of the peak time slots during the week used for football. The club plays across 2 sites, with one pitch being full-sized but having no lighting to enable training to take place, and the other pitch having lighting but only being half size and so unable to host matches. 1 full-size sports-lit pitch will have sufficient capacity to accommodate the club's demand to 2040, if the current arrangement across 2 pitches is not sustainable for any reason.
- Financial, off-site, contributions from strategic housing allocations should be channelled into the closest club or clubs or their home

grounds within the sub-area, focused on priority actions which can help to sustain and grow clubs, as identified in the PPS.

Cricket

- There is an under supply of cricket pitches to cater for current demand. This undersupply is located close to the more densely populated areas of Newbury, Thatcham, Reading fringe and the A4 corridor between Thatcham and Reading.
- Clubs in the study area are growing, and this growth is coming from junior and the women market where there has been significant growth in recent years. This growth is predicted to continue and is generally concentrated at clubs with existing junior sections. These clubs are generally already at or close to capacity so there is minimal room for further growth without access to more pitches.
- Projections for growth suggest that the junior game and Women & Girls cricket would see most growth.
- Clubs with junior sections are continuing to grow and have / will outgrow their existing facilities. These clubs are looking for additional grounds to continue to service their membership and growth.
- Many ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as changing facilities, toilets and pavilions) are not fit for purpose for Women & Girls, and this market is likely to grow very fast over the period of the strategy.
- More artificial pitches and practice facilities will be required to help protect the grass pitches by providing additional capacity to host junior matches and provide training facilities for both juniors and seniors.

- Securing community use at club home grounds where there is currently unsecure community use is important to give clubs certainty.
- There is very limited use of school sites as venues for community cricket clubs. Opening up these facilities in areas that have an undersupply of pitches could help to alleviate some of this overplay while creating partnerships with the schools. This is already being explored by some clubs.
- Many clubs use volunteers to prepare their pitches and are over reliant upon this resource. It is generally an ageing workforce and the demands of the role have increased due to the growth of junior cricket and many sites being in use 6 or 7 days a week.
- If projected growth comes to fruition, by 2041, then the shortfall in cricket provision will get worse. Where possible strategic allocation sites should be explored to provide additional capacity for cricket, through providing new sites and pitches, and through off site contributions to existing sites.

Tennis

- West Berkshire's tennis court capacity is unevenly distributed. Some club venues are operating well over capacity, while other venues run significantly below their limits.
- Most LTA-registered clubs are within a 10-minute drive for car users, but underserved areas and non-car users experience noticeable coverage gaps.
- No padel courts currently exist despite an estimated 2,461 local players, indicating the need for at least 12 dedicated courts.
- Facility quality varies widely: many courts suffer from worn surfaces, absent sports-lighting and minimal ancillary services.

Upgrading non-registered community and educational sites could strategically fill geographic shortfalls.

- Encouraging pay-and-play access at club sites and optimising public parks would broaden casual and non-member participation. Booking and access systems are inconsistent; wider adoption of automated, smart-access technology would maximise availability.
- A coordinated investment plan is required to rebalance capacity, modernise courts, introduce padel facilities, standardise access models and ensure consistent quality.

Netball

- All netball courts are shared surfaces which limits dedicated netball capacity and causes scheduling conflicts. Clubs report unsecured access to venues, reducing reliable court time despite apparent overall supply.
- Facility quality is largely “Standard,” with some school courts rated “Poor” or “Unplayable” due to moss, wear and outdated infrastructure. Ancillary amenities (changing rooms, lighting, signage) require targeted upgrades to meet safety, competitive and community expectations.
- Immediate refurbishment of poor or unplayable courts and ancillary improvements are essential to ensure consistency across all sites.
- Most courts lie within a 30-minute drive for car owners, but community access is often restricted at school-managed sites, creating geographic gaps.
- Secured community-access protocols and dependable booking systems or dedicated time slots are needed at schools and outsourced facilities.

- Leveraging EN non-registered sites owned by local authorities or educational institutions would relieve pressure on existing venues and offer flexible, community-focused options.

Lacrosse

- Phoenix Lacrosse Club (Newbury) struggle to access pitches with Lacrosse markings to cater for both training and matches. This is in terms of all year round and during peak periods of weekends for matches.
- The club are not able to grow anymore due to the lack of facilities. There is women’s team that has formed but can’t play matches due to no lacrosse pitch being available on Sundays.
- Lacrosse coaches are hard to find so this can be a challenge with a growing membership.
- Competition from other traditional larger sports mean that the club often gets overlooked and not prioritised for AGP bookings.
- The club has no where they can call ‘home’ so struggle with a disrupted and disjointed offering for its members.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

From the assessment undertaken, strategic priorities can be identified. These set the core “thrust” of the strategy in broad terms, providing the overarching context for the detailed and site-specific “Protect”, “Enhance” and “Provide” recommendations (set out in full in Background Document 1) and delivery of priority actions set out in the next section. The strategic priorities, across sports, are as follows.



1. PROTECT

- i. **Protect existing supply** of grass playing pitches and AGPs, both those in use which currently host known demand and those not currently in use (including those available but unused, those not available for community use and disused sites) on the basis of the need to address lack of capacity for some sports in the WBC area, the need to introduce a “reservoir” of grass pitch supply to provide additional capacity during the winter months, the lack of any “new” greenfield sites to introduce additional supply and the potential for future demand also requiring their use. Any proposals for change of use or development of pitches must pass the Sport England Playing Fields Policy tests and relevant National Planning Policy Framework requirements.



2. ENHANCE

- i. **Improve existing pitches, courts and ancillary facilities**, where possible, to make better and maximise use of supply:
 - a) to grass pitch quality to increase carrying capacity, reduce overplay / deficit of capacity and improve reliability of use during wet winters for football and rugby union, prioritising improvements where

- increased usage is demonstrably practical and feasible;
- b) to increase provision of lighting on grass rugby pitches where this is in sync with quality improvements and improved maintenance;
- c) to substandard surfaces and lighting on identified AGPs;
- d) to outdoor tennis and netball courts in poor or sub-standard condition; and,
- e) to the accessibility to, safety of and quality of changing facilities, clubhouses and pavilions (including provision of facilities where there are currently none, where there is known or likely demand from clubs), particularly given the desired growth across sports in the girls’ and women’s game and in disability sport.
- ii. There is a need for continuing partnership working with the operators / owners of pitches and clubs which use sites with unsecure community use (or clubs with no certainty of tenure in the long-term) to **secure tenure**, thereby minimising the risk to clubs of loss of use of their pitches.



3. PROVIDE

- i. Develop and implement the masterplan for the strategic **Henwick Worthy** site, Thatcham, aiming to:
 - a. create a hockey hub site;
 - b. maintain and improve capacity for rugby and football;
 - c. maintain capacity for cricket; and,
 - d. make various environmental and leisure / recreation enhancements.
- ii. Support improvements to the **Faraday Road** football pitch site, Newbury, including provision of a full-size (11v11) sports-lit 3G pitch.

- iii. Alongside other measures, consider the role and location of a new **strategic hub site** for sport(s) in the Newbury / Thatcham area to help cater for existing deficits / overplay and future demand.
- iv. Identify and deliver additional sites which can accommodate **new grass pitches** to meet demand not satisfied through pitch quality improvements or bringing back into use unused pitches.
- v. Co-ordinate the **phasing of delivery** within and across sports, particularly in relation to sports which currently (or could in the future) share pitches, sites, facilities and / or surface types.
- vi. Address the current deficit in the supply and availability of **3G pitches** across sub-areas.
- vii. There is an under supply of **cricket pitches** in the more densely populated areas of Newbury, Thatcham, Reading fringe and the A4 corridor and these to be addressed via a variety of options including:
 - a. create new cricket pitches opportunities on existing playing fields and open spaces.
 - b. enhance the quality of the existing facilities to maximise the capacity of the current pitches.
 - c. ensure sites are supported by off field practice net facilities where feasible.
- viii. Provide additional **netball and tennis court capacity** for community use at existing outdoor netball and tennis club and education sites where demand requires it, with additional sports lighting provided at sites which see or could see evening use during the sports' seasons.
- ix. Support the development of new **padel** courts across parks, clubs, leisure centres and private-sector venues to meet identified unmet demand, permitting conversion of existing tennis courts only where an LTA-approved capacity assessment confirms that tennis demand will continue to be met.
- x. Accommodate **exported football demand** wishing to return to West Berkshire, particularly teams using grass pitches in neighbouring authority areas. Clarifying aspirations of clubs with displaced demand wishing to return to West Berkshire area will form an important part of this process.
- xi. Opportunities should be taken to consider the relationship between (and potential impacts of) existing and future pitch use and the contribution of their location and use to the reduction of carbon emissions, as well as wider sustainability issues. Solutions, within and outside of sport, should be considered to help **decarbonise sport** and, in turn, improve viability, financial security and sustainability of pitches, courts and clubs.

4. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

The strategy provides an objectively, evidence based “direction of travel”, with the aim of achieving positive outcomes for people who play or would like to play sport and cannot be a “blueprint” for change. In doing so it must be recognised that:

- i. Data, projections and demand gathered principally in 2024/25 will change over time. Therefore, the strategy’s delivery (and therefore the impact on existing and future supply and demand challenges) must be monitored, and the timing, amount and location of delivery will vary during the strategy period.
- ii. In the majority of cases, the PPS provides flexibility and a range of options to deliver additional supply. This is necessary to give flexibility of plans of what to deliver and when with regard to new pitch capacity. It is not the role of the PPS to “straight-jacket” options over a 15 year period and stage E monitoring and delivery meetings (1 to 4 per year) are key to successful delivery responding to demand “on the ground”.
- iii. The PPS informs future NGB investment plans and programmes (across both pitch and facility support for clubs and wider support for operational requirements).

4.1 Monitoring and Review

It is important that baseline data such as team numbers and supply / demand balance, the strategy itself and the impact of its actions are monitored to ensure that supply matches both projected demand set out in this strategy and demand “on the ground”.

This is particularly important later during the strategy period given that the timing of when future demand will emerge “on the ground” in the longer-term is less accurate given that it is based on projections.

As actions are implemented, a “plan, deliver, monitor, manage” approach should be employed. It is recommended that a “Stage E” action plan review meeting of the Steering Group should take place at 3, 6 or 12 monthly intervals, but more frequently if issues suggest a need. These meetings must not be a replacement for important delivery work which should take place on a continuous basis between delivery partners.

Additional guidance for use of this strategy by local authority officers has been set out in Background Document 2.

4.2 Recommendations and Action Plan

Priorities by Sport

The strategy's detailed recommendations encapsulated within "Protect", "Enhance" and "Provide" headings are set-out in full in Background Document 1. These set out the individual and issue specific actions which need to take place during the period to 2041.

Following consultation on the draft strategy and any changes made as a result, confirmed recommendations and actions should be set out and monitored in a "live" action plan framework which members of the steering group will have a responsibility to update and implement. Implementation will depend on steering group members co-ordinating and working closely with clubs, teams, leagues, operators and owners of current pitches and owners of potential sites for additional pitches.

The action plan framework will, in time, be updated and delivery informed by other priorities such as (but not limited to) response to the climate emergency, economic recovery and levels of deprivation. The delivery stage will also confirm options for change on a site-by-site basis as further work during implementation is done on feasibility, viability and implications of other actions.

PPS guidance recommends that an action plan is consulted upon as part of the strategy and therefore, the following priority actions, are presented for each sport. The priority actions are those which need to commence in the first 3 years of the strategy period (and preferably as soon as the strategy has been approved and adopted). Other projects identified in the detailed recommendations may also need to be delivered, but those listed below form the focus for action in the first part of the strategy period.

Football (Grass)



1. MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING SUPPLY (ENHANCE)

- i. Secure community use of unsecure pitches.
- ii. Prioritise additional supply near to areas of highest demand and near to and / or on overplayed pitches.
- iii. Identify unused and underused pitches which can realistically be used to introduce additional capacity.
- iv. Make ready a supply of unused pitches across pitch sizes, particularly on the A4 corridor (Hungerford-Newbury-Thatcham-Theale / Calcot) which can serve as a reserve supply in winter.



2. IMPROVE QUALITY AND CAPACITY (ENHANCE)

- i. Prioritise secure community use pitches over unsecure pitches.
- ii. Improve quality of existing pitches to increase carrying capacity / usage where pitches are:
 - a. Overplayed and poor quality;
 - b. Overplayed and standard quality.
- iii. Improve quality of ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as clubhouses, changing facilities, pavilions, sports-lighting, dugouts, etc.) to better support and sustain all formats of the game.



3. UTILISE WEEKEND 3G CAPACITY (ENHANCE)

- i. Supplement (but do not replace) grass pitch use for matches with available capacity on FA Register 3Gs.



4. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Alongside the above measures, identify additional sites which can accommodate new grass pitches to meet demand not satisfied through 1. and 2. in:
 - a. Urban areas and along the A4 corridor in the South and East sub-areas (Hungerford-Newbury-Thatcham-Theale / Calcot) and the southern edge of North and West sub-area where demand is greatest, there is a deficit in capacity / remaining overplay; and,
 - b. Rural North and West sub-area.

Football (3G)



1. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Deliver additional 3G capacity at priority locations / sites such as:
 - a) Faraday Road, Newbury;
 - b) Henwick Worthy, Thatcham; and,
 - c) In the East / North and West sub-area boundary areas with Newbury and Thatcham, the edge of Reading (for example, in the Calcot / Tilehurst area) and A4 corridor.
- ii. Identify a programme of phased delivery of other additional 3G capacity needed, steered by the options identified in the recommendations.

Hockey



1. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Deliver an additional full-size sports-lit sand dressed AGP at Henwick Worthy to support Newbury and Thatcham HC's demand and create a hockey hub.

Rugby Union



1. MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING SUPPLY (ENHANCE)

- i. Secure community use of unsecure pitches.



2. IMPROVE QUALITY AND CAPACITY (ENHANCE)

- i. Prioritise secure community use pitches over unsecure pitches.
- ii. Improve quality of existing pitches to increase carrying capacity / usage where pitches are:
 - a. Overplayed and poor quality;
 - b. Overplayed and standard quality.
- iii. Introduce additional sports-lighting with accompanying improved maintenance to maintain quality to increase capacity for evening weekday training.
- iv. Improve quality of ancillary facilities (including infrastructure such as clubhouses, changing facilities, sports-lighting, etc.) to better support and sustain all formats of the game.

Cricket



1. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Provide additional capacity for cricket in the Newbury, Thatcham, Reading fringe and A4 corridor areas, addressing this through a variety of options including:
 - a. enhancing the quality of the existing facilities to maximise the capacity of the current pitches;
 - b. creating new cricket pitches opportunities on existing playing fields and open spaces; and,

- c. ensuring sites are supported by off field practice net facilities where feasible.

Tennis



1. MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING SUPPLY (ENHANCE)

- i. Support clubs to be more accessible to non-members, offering Pay & Play opportunities with good customer journey to court to fill gaps in provision.
- ii. Improve access to outdoor courts within the education sector for community use out of school hours with easy online journey to court.

☆☆☆ 2. IMPROVE QUALITY AND CAPACITY (ENHANCE)

- i. Improve quality of courts and ancillary provision to meet consumer expectations, and increase court capacity by installing sports-lighting where demand has been identified.



3. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Support the development of new tennis and padel tennis facilities across multiple contexts. Consider parks, clubs, leisure centres and private-sector venues equally when identifying sites for new courts.
- ii. Only permit conversion of existing tennis courts to padel where an LTA-approved capacity assessment confirms that traditional tennis demand will continue to be met.
- iii. Insist on clear commitments to community use and accessible pricing models. A community use agreement should be recommended as a condition for planning permission.

Netball



1. MAKE BETTER USE OF EXISTING SUPPLY (ENHANCE)

- i. Increasing the number of dedicated netball courts to reduce conflicts from multi-use applications.
- ii. Implementing secure community access protocols and guaranteed scheduling to enhance the reliability of facility use.



2. IMPROVE QUALITY AND CAPACITY (ENHANCE)

- i. Prioritising refurbishment and updating poor-quality or unplayable courts, including improving ancillary facilities like changing rooms and sports-lighting.



3. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Monitor bookings and participation annually; when demand exceeds supply, allocate funds to plan a new netball hub.

Lacrosse



1. INTRODUCE NEW SUPPLY / CAPACITY (PROVIDE)

- i. Provide Phoenix Lacrosse Club (Newbury) club with a 'home' venue with three Lacrosse pitches to service their current membership and facilitate the growth of the club. Location to be close to Newbury and could be a shared site. Options to be agreed with the club.