

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet - 13 April 2026

Report Title

Playing Pitch Strategy

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Andrew Bramidge, Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Playing Pitch Strategy - Part 1 (PPS) provides an up-to-date, robust, Sport England compliant assessment of the supply, demand and future needs for outdoor sports facilities in Rotherham. It covers football, cricket, rugby union, rugby league, hockey, tennis and padel.

The PPS is essential for:

- Planning Policy (evidence base for Local Plan review to 2040)
- Developer contributions (Access to Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator)
- Investment (supporting bids to the sports funders such as the Football Association, English Cricket Board and Lawn Tennis Association)
- Protecting playing fields as per the National Planning Policy Framework requirements
- Meeting participation demand, across all pitch sports

The Strategy identifies significant current and future shortfalls in multiple sports, particularly football (youth formats), cricket, rugby union and 3G pitches. It provides a clear action plan for the next 3-5 years, with strategic direction to 2040.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the headline findings of the Playing Pitch Strategy 2026 – 2029 Part 1.
2. Approve and formally adopt the Part 1 Strategy as the evidence base for:
 - a. Local Plan review to 2040
 - b. Planning decisions
 - c. Developer contributions (via Sport England PPS calculator)
 - d. Investment planning with National Governing Bodies
3. Agree to receive a further report on the Playing Pitch Strategy Part 2 which will set out the response to the recommendations contained in Part 1, including Rotherham Council's vision and implementation plan.
4. Agree that the PPS is monitored annually and reviewed every 3 years, or sooner if significant changes occur.
5. Delegate implementation oversight to the Service Director for Culture, Sport and Tourism, supported by the Sport & Physical Activity Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Rotherham Playing Pitch Strategy- Part 1
- Appendix 2 Rotherham Playing Pitch Strategy Full Assessment Report
- Appendix 3 Part A Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 4 Part B Equality Analysis
- Appendix 5 Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

N/A

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Improving Places Select Commission – 10 March 2026

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Playing Pitch Strategy

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham's Playing Pitch Strategy Part 1 provides a strategic framework for the protection, improvement and development of outdoor sports provision across football, rugby union, rugby league, cricket, hockey, tennis and padel pitches.
- 1.2 The most recent PPS for Rotherham was produced in 2005, followed by a subsequent review which led to adoption by Cabinet in 2009. However, the methodology utilised by Sport England has been updated and they no longer recognise their 2005 version. The new Sport England guidance was produced in 2013. It was not possible to produce a new strategy until now, due to lack of resource: the loss of the Sports Development Team due to local government austerity and changes to Sport England grant funding. Following the availability of funding via Section 106 in 2024 and the creation of the new Sport and Physical Activity Manager post, it has been possible to deliver a new strategy.
- 1.3 The PPS will be presented in 2 parts: Part 1 is presented here and covers the needs assessment related to playing pitch provision in Rotherham. Subject to approval of Part 1, Part 2 will outline a clear vision, cover how the recommendations will be implemented and resourced, working in collaboration with the stakeholders on the Playing Pitch Steering Group.
- 1.4 This PPS uses the Sport England PPS methodology and Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG) for non-pitch sports.
- 1.5 It provides the required evidence base for planning, investment and protection of playing fields under National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.6 It incorporates future demand to 2040, aligned with the current Local Plan, including housing, population growth and sports club aspirations.
- 1.7 An up-to-date PPS enables access to Sport England calculators used to calculate housing developer contributions to sports provision.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The three aims of the strategy are:
 1. To **protect** the existing supply of outdoor sport provision and ancillary facilities where it is needed for meeting current and future needs.
 2. To **enhance** outdoor sport provision and ancillary facilities through improving quality and management of sites.
 3. To **provide** new outdoor sport provision and ancillary facilities where there is current or future demand to do so.

The PPS Part 1 shall achieve these aims by:

- 2.1.1 Assessing Current and Future Needs
 - Evaluating the quantity, quality, and accessibility of existing pitches.
 - Considering population growth, participation trends, and club development to forecast future demand.
- 2.1.2 Supporting Planning and Financial Investment
 - Providing evidence for planning applications and helping secure funding from bodies like Sport England, The Football Association, The Rugby Football Union and the England Cricket Board.
 - Ensuring that new developments contribute to sports provision and protect existing facilities.
- 2.1.3 Protecting and Enhancing Facilities
 - Identifying pitches at risk and setting priorities for maintenance, improvement, or replacement.
 - Helping safeguard playing fields from inappropriate development under planning policy.
- 2.1.4 Promoting Participation and Health
 - Encouraging community engagement, grassroots sport, and physical activity, supporting wider health and wellbeing objectives.
 - Aligning with local authority strategies for sport, leisure, and social inclusion.
- 2.1.5 Coordinating Stakeholders
 - Bringing together clubs, schools, governing bodies, and developers to ensure a joined-up approach.
 - Creating a clear action plan for delivery over a 3-year period.
- 2.2 Although the needs assessment process has considered provision up to the year 2040, the lifespan of the new PPS is considered to be three years, although this can be increased if it is kept up to date, which is why delivery will be monitored annually. If it is not monitored and updated, a full Playing Pitch Strategy would need to be produced which would take another 12 months and further costs would be incurred.
- 2.3 The headline findings from the PPS for each individual sport are:
 - 2.3.1 Football (Grass): There is a current shortfall in pitch provision for the youth age group in both 11v11 and 9v9 formats. There is an adequate number of adult size pitches and mini soccer pitches for young children. Within these age groups there is spare capacity to accommodate more teams. It is predicted that there will be more demand in the future; with potentially between 16 and 24 new grass pitches being needed by 2040 if no improvements are made, both to the quality of some of the existing stock and to increasing the number of pitches. This can be achieved by either improving the condition current stock to increase the amount of matches possible or by increasing the number of pitches to increase overall capacity.

- 2.3.2 3G (artificial) Football Pitches: The Borough currently has a supply of 7.25 full-size pitches. It is anticipated there will be a demand for between 9 and 13.5 in the future. This is dependent on the extent of growth of the Borough's population. The need in the south area of the Borough is most acute.
- 2.3.3 Rugby Union: There is a shortfall of 19 matches per season (one game's worth of use on a pitch), rising to 23.5 by 2040 (in line with The Local Plan) with between 19 and 24 new grass pitches required if not mitigated by quality upgrades or a World Rugby-compliant 3G pitch (this is a different specification to football).
- 2.3.4 Cricket: 11 cricket grounds out of 19 are overplayed by 237 matches per season. This means the number of matches overall played on each wicket is higher than is recommended by the ECB. The installation of 36 additional wickets at key sites within the current stock would resolve this current shortfall. The addition of artificial, as well as grass, pitches would also alleviate this pressure.
- 2.3.5 Hockey: The Borough has 3 full-size artificial grass pitches which meet current demand, but this does not leave any room for growth in the sport. The pitch at Dinnington High School is in need of resurfacing, but it is likely this will change to become a 3G football pitch to meet unmet demand in football. There is the potential for Oakwood School's pitch to have more capacity if Chapeltown Hockey Club moves back to Sheffield.
- 2.3.6 Tennis: There are 56 courts across the Borough. Club demand is currently being met, but non-club courts need their quality improving along with lighting in order to be accessible for use all year round. It has been identified that there will be 3 new courts required by 2040. Padel is on the increase and is the fastest growing sport globally. Rotherham does not currently have any courts. In order to meet demand, it is predicted that 21 new courts are needed.
- 2.3.7 Rugby League: Rotherham does not host a full-contact club. There is a need to monitor future demand and maintain access for our only limited contact club, Rotherham Nomads Rugby League FC.
- 2.4 Monitoring and Delivery of the Playing Pitch Strategy
- 2.4.1 The PPS Steering Group will develop and create an action plan using the information gathered, listing sites that require improvement and sports that require support by priority. The Steering Group will be chaired by and report into the Council's Sport & Physical Activity Manager. This Group will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Strategy and the required improvements to the various pitch sports. It will be the responsibility of the site owner to lead and manage the pitch improvement or development. This will not be the Council if the site is not within its ownership.
- 2.4.2 The Steering Group will comprise of representatives from The Football Association, Sheffield and Hallamshire County FA, RUFC Community Trust, The Yorkshire Cricket Board, The Rugby Football Union, The Rugby Football

League, The Lawn Tennis Association, England Hockey, Sport England and the Council.

2.4.3 The PPS will be a live document which will be used to:

- consult when developer contributions are required from housing schemes;
- act as a reference point for assessment of requests from local voluntary clubs for asset transfers on pitch sites; and
- justify funding applications and S106/CIL contributions when improvements are required over time

2.4.4 Continued cross-departmental governance of the PPS Action Plan and engagement with National Governing Bodies will be vital in terms of keeping the document up to date and fit for purpose. Opportunities to secure funding to sustain a dedicated PPS implementation resource will be explored (e.g. Sport England, Football Foundation) and set out in Part 2 of the Playing Pitch Strategy when that is produced later in the year.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Do nothing.

This leaves the Council and partners without a compliant evidence base and weakens planning decisions, developer negotiations and the protection of playing fields **(Not recommended)**

3.2 Adopt The PPS- Part 1.

This ensures compliance with Sport England methodology and will provide a robust evidence base for Local Plan policies. It can also unlock access to national funding (e.g. Football Foundation) and will help to ensure clear, prioritised site-specific improvements **(Recommended)**

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Extensive consultation has taken place with:

- Sport England
- National Governing Bodies for sport: Football Association, Football Foundation, Rugby Football Union, Rugby Football League, English Cricket Board, Lawn Tennis Association
- Local clubs across all sports (over 100 clubs engaged)
- Schools and education providers
- Community organisations
- Neighbouring authorities (Barnsley, Doncaster, Sheffield)

4.2 Consultation with clubs included:

- Location of pitches including unused sites
- Number of club members/teams
- A club's aspirations for the future
- Usage of a pitch
- Pitch assessments
- Ancillary provision

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Immediate adoption allows use in the Local Plan evidence base (2026-2040).

5.2 Implementation responsibility:

Service Director – Culture Sport and Tourism

Head of Service – Sport, Leisure and Strategic Partnerships

Supported by: Sport & Physical Activity Manager, Culture, Sport & Tourism

5.3 The key next steps are as follows:

- Develop a Multi-Pitch Investment Portfolio for 3G Pitches – By September 2026
- Production of Playing Pitch Strategy Part 2 – By November 2026
- Produce Monitoring Report on PPS - Part 1 – By April 2027

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The cost of the PPS was met through a s106 contribution. Part 2 of the Playing Pitch Strategy will include an action plan with associated costs and timescales. The Strategy will also support bids to relevant funding bodies and the prioritisation of capital funding when it becomes available. The steering group will oversee the implementation of this plan.

6.2 An important aspect of the PPS is it is a forward-looking document that has been established to support future funding bids and define priorities when and where funding is available. Part 1 has identified the needs, and Part 2 will clarify how the Council and partners will respond to these needs over time, prioritising the recommendations from Part 1 and utilising the Strategy Part 2 to:

- Direct the Council's own capital resources and those of our partners
- Prioritise investment through Planning Gain (Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106)
- Make the case for funding through external grants and foundations

Without the Playing Pitch Strategy, Sport England and other funders will not be willing to support significant investment into the borough.

6.3 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report. If there is a need to engage third party suppliers to support delivery of the strategy, this must be procured in compliance with relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023) dependent on the route to market, as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There is no Statutory Duty upon a local authority to prepare a PPS, however Sport England guidance describes a Playing Pitch Strategy as the

recommended approach to help local authorities understand need and plan provision.

- 7.2 Further, the Playing Pitch Strategy document will help the Council meet National Planning Policy Framework requirements for robust and up-to-date evidence when planning for sport and protecting playing fields, and further the Playing Pitch Strategy will underpin the Local Plan process as set out in the body of the report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy will have a positive impact on children, young people and vulnerable adults by improving access to safe, high-quality outdoor sports facilities across the borough. The PPS identifies significant shortfalls in youth sports provision and sets out the investment and planning framework required to address these. Enhanced pitch quality, increased capacity, and improved ancillary provision will support participation, physical activity, health and wellbeing for children and young people, including those who are vulnerable or from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 9.2 Adoption of the PPS strengthens the protection of playing fields, supports long-term planning for accessible community sport, and enables investment through national governing body funding streams. This will ensure safe environments, inclusive opportunities and improved pathways for young people and vulnerable adults. Increased local provision will also reduce travel barriers, support active travel and provide more accessible routes into structured sport, education partnerships and inclusive programmes.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Both an Initial Equality Screening and an Equality Analysis have been completed and are attached as Appendices 3 and 4.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy has a mixed climate impact, with some near-term carbon costs associated with construction of new or improved sports facilities, but with long-term environmental and social benefits. Carbon emissions from energy use in ancillary facilities may be mitigated by energy efficient design including LED lighting; whereas ensuring adequate provision of playing pitches throughout Rotherham may limit distances travelled to them, with more opportunities for active travel as a result. Protecting existing grass pitches from changes in use – and protecting grass pitches themselves from being ‘overplayed’ – may conserve or enhance the value of ecosystem services provided by these green spaces, as carbon stores and for rainwater infiltration.

11.2 Full details are available from the Climate Impact Assessment at Appendix 5.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The adoption of the PPS ensures that all partners named in this document have a shared strategic framework for addressing current sports pitch shortfalls, supporting funding applications, coordinating delivery, and improving the quality and accessibility of outdoor sports provision across Rotherham. It will strengthen joint working by providing partners with a clear, Sport England-compliant evidence base to guide planning, protect playing fields, and prioritise investment. This will be communicated via the Moving Rotherham Partnership Board and associated sports sub-networks e.g. the Tennis Network Group.
- 12.2 It will enable local clubs, leagues, schools and health partners to identify where capacity shortfalls exist, for example in youth football, cricket, rugby union and tennis/padel and to work collectively on solutions that expand participation opportunities for children, young people and adults.
- 12.3 The PPS also supports schools and academies by aligning facility improvements with future population growth and curriculum need, helping them maintain or expand community use.
- 12.4 For National Governing Bodies, the PPS provides the robust data required to unlock targeted funding streams and ensure resources are directed to the most impactful projects.

13. Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation
Insufficient resources to deliver PPS	Secure internal and/or external funding; cross-department responsibility
Pressure on playing fields from developments	PPS provides statutory protection evidence
Increasing participation outpacing supply	Annual monitoring through the steering group
Club viability issues	Targeted facility improvements and tenure security

14. Accountable Officers

Chris Siddall, Head of Service - Sport, Leisure and Strategic Partnerships

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	20/03/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Rob Mahon	20/03/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	20/03/26

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