

This report is public	
Whitelands Farm Sports Ground 3G Pitch	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	3 March 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Healthy and Safe Communities, Councillor Rob Pattenden
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	19 February 2026
Report of	Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services, Nicola Riley

Purpose of report

To obtain Executive Approval to commence next steps on the development of a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester. The report outlines any financial risks.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the next steps in developing a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester accounting for any financial risk outlined within the report

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 An opportunity has been identified to increase and enhance the leisure facilities within Cherwell with the development of a new 3G Football Pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester which would add to the current provision.
- 2.2 S106 funds have been identified to part fund this new facility with the remaining monies being sought from external funding.
- 2.3 Partnership funding has been explored with the Football Foundation and initial conversations suggest that this is a facility that the Football Foundation would consider funding up to 75% of. Overall delivery costs are expected to be circa £900,000
- 2.4 Some pre-construction surveys have already been undertaken by the Football Foundation at their own risk demonstrating their commitment to the proposed scheme.

- 2.5 Any identified risks in progressing with the Football Foundation as a funding partner for the delivery and construction of the new facilities are outlined within the report.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	<p>The funding for the proposed new 3G pitch at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester is through identified S106 and partnership funding of up to 75% of project costs with the Football Foundation.</p> <p>However, it must be noted that there is a financial risk to the Council if the funding agreement is signed but the project does not go ahead if the Council decides to withdraw. If this does happen, the Council will be liable to pay the costs of the preliminary investigations, capped at £35k. This will need to be paid through Council resource and not the identified S106.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 22 December 2025</p>
Legal	<p>Legal Services have provided advice in relation to the agreements and funding proposals put forward by the Football Foundation. As noted within the report the overall commitment should the project proceed to completion will be in excess of the £250,000 financial threshold.</p> <p>While at present as the report notes there is no financial risk to the authority, once CDC makes the decision to proceed with an application then it must comply with certain deadlines and requirements or risk having to spend S106 monies reimbursing the Football Foundation.</p> <p>CDC must submit a grant funding application within 12 months of signing the proposed letter and will then be tied into signing up to the funding agreement for the full project within 2 months of a successful application.</p> <p>Legal Services can continue to provide advice on each stage of the project as it proceeds.</p> <p>Denzil – John Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 31 December 025</p>
Risk Management	<p>The main risks include meeting Football Foundation criteria for funding, such as commitments to women and girls' football and securing a partner club, which could delay progress. Reliance on external partners for procurement and delivery introduces operational and timeline risks, while environmental impacts from floodlighting and artificial surfaces may require mitigation. There is also reputational risk if the project fails to meet community expectations or deliver the benefits outlined in the Playing Pitch Strategy. These risks are being managed through the service operational risk and will be escalated to the leadership risk register as and when deemed necessary.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 19 December 2025</p>

Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				N/A
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		N/A
Climate & Environmental Impact		x		N/A
ICT & Digital Impact		x		N/A
Data Impact		x		N/A
Procurement & subsidy	x			Discussions have commenced previously with Procurement team on accessing the Football Foundation Framework and working in partnership
Council Priorities	Community Leadership			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	Yes – the asset, once constructed will belong to the District Council, however the responsibility for the maintenance and management of the new 3G pitch will be that of Bicester Town Council as part of the long-term lease arrangement			
Consultation & Engagement	Community Engagement will align itself to the values of the Football Foundation and the targeted groups within this to access the funding for a new 3G Facility			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 Whitelands Farm Sports Ground in Bicester was constructed and subsequently opened to members of the public in September 2017. The project was funded through s106 developer contributions delivering excellent leisure facilities to residents of Bicester.
- 3.2 Facilities provided on site include, 2 x full-sized floodlit grass rugby pitches, grass football pitches, a floodlit 3G world rugby compliant artificial pitch, cricket pitch, perimeter running track, outdoor gym equipment and associated infrastructure, including a 6-changing room pavilion and car parking.
- 3.3 Function rooms, bar and catering facilities are located on the first floor of the building.
- 3.4 The Sports Ground is an integral part of the leisure provision within Bicester ensuring local clubs and sporting organisations can access facilities for match and training purposes.
- 3.5 On completion of the construction of the Whitelands Farm Sports Ground the facilities were initially operated under contract to Parkwood/Legacy Leisure following a robust tender process for a minimum term of 5 years with options to extend.
- 3.6 At the end of year 4 of the contract, having received the proposed, revised subsidy cost for the next 5 years (in line with the contractual obligations), Bicester Town Council expressed an interest in operating the facilities longer term, rather than pay a subsidy to the management company as well as taking on a long-term lease for the site.
- 3.7 Lease arrangements were agreed between Cherwell District Council and Bicester Town Council which are still waiting to be formally signed.

4. Details

- 4.1 The previously commissioned Cherwell Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) identifies the need for an additional two 3G football facilities in Bicester to meet both the current and future demand of residents, with the PPS stating that 'installation of a second full-size pitch at Whitelands for football usage to enable greater rugby use of the existing pitch and to reduce localised shortfalls'.
- 4.2 The project will involve the construction and installation of a new 3G football pitch adjacent to the existing one with similar characteristics including fenced surrounds and floodlights to enable the facility to be used into the evening.
- 4.3 Additional infrastructure works such as car parking and changing rooms are unlikely to need to be developed as the current facilities are well served in this aspect.

- 4.4 Adding to existing provision on the site, other benefits will be realised including increased footfall to the café as well as the obvious health benefits that these facilities can bring. The primary benefit however will be to meet the unmet demand of 3G pitches that this would seek to alleviate within the Town.
- 4.5 Funding for the project is to be determined through remaining s106 allocations to Whitelands Farm Sports Ground and Partnership Funding (up to 75% from the Football Foundation). Having previously engaged with the Football Foundation and securing funding on the development of the Playzones in Banbury, there is a desire from the Football Foundation to build on this partnership.
- 4.6 Access to the funding is subject to certain criteria outlined by the Football Foundation which includes a % allocation of access to the 3G pitch for women and girls' football as well as identifying a partner club for the project within the Bicester area, who can deliver on these obligations in developing women and girls football.
- 4.7 The project would be delivered by the Football Foundation in partnership with the District Council and Bicester Town Council, with the Football Foundation leading on procurement of the contractor, through the construction phase and then through to handover of the new facility.
- 4.8 For the District Council to be able to access the 'up to 75%' partnership funding from the Football Foundation there is a requirement to sign a funding agreement which kick starts the projects and allows for the Football Foundation to commence preliminary works beyond those previously mentioned. This would generally include site investigation surveys/site specific surveys etc.
- 4.9 Should the Council sign the funding agreement with the Football Foundation and the Football Foundation decide to **not** offer the grant then there is no requirement for the Council to pay any of these preliminary costs, including should planning permission not be granted.
- 4.10 Should an offer, however, be made to the Council following a successful application, then the Authority will have an obligation committing to the delivery of the new 3G or be responsible for the repayment to the Football Foundation of the preliminary costs which are circa £35,000. At this stage the primary risk lies with this obligation, however for the reasons highlighted earlier, there is a desire to deliver on the actions within the Playing Pitch Strategy but more importantly driving the opportunity to deliver much needed leisure facilities within the district.
- 4.11 Given the unmet demand of 3G facilities within Cherwell (including Bicester) this would appear to be an excellent opportunity to secure a significant amount of grant funding to support with the delivery of this project

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to apply for grant funding from the Football Foundation
Cherwell District Council

This to be rejected on the basis that without Football Foundation/3rd Party Funding then the delivery of new facilities becomes unaffordable and the unmet demand for 3G pitches in Bicester remains. The ability to deliver on the actions within the Playing Pitch Strategy and provide excellent leisure facilities to residents is extremely important

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 In conclusion, it is recommended that officers are to be instructed to continue to work in partnership with the Football Foundation to seek to secure grant funding. Whilst there is a risk that should the Council not wish to proceed with the project even after a grant offer from the Football Foundation the level of this risk is capped at circa £35,000.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes – Financial Threshold of over £250,000 Capital Expenditure on whole cost of Project
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	Bicester South and Ambrosden

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Football Foundation Funding Agreement
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Liam Didcock, Leisure and Community Facilities Manager
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Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Interim Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services, 19 February 2025