

This report is public	
Whitelands Farm Sports Ground Cricket Mitigation	
Committee	N/A Portfolio Holder Decision
Date of Committee	N/A (Portfolio Meeting)
Portfolio Holder agreeing the report	Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cllr Lisa Smith
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	24/08/2026
Report of	Nicola Riley – Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing Services.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to obtain Portfolio Holder Approval to re-purpose the existing cricket square, outfield and associated areas at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground (Whitelands) in Bicester with a view to increasing formal sports provision on the site based on evidenced need.

The loss of rugby facilities at the Oxford Road Sports Facility, has required a thorough exploration of the options to increase provision at Whitelands for both rugby and football.

When Whitelands was constructed, it included the provision of a cricket pitch on the site. The cricket facility has never been used since the facility was opened some 10 years ago, and there has been very limited interest from any local clubs/organisations in booking it. The cricket facility is located at the furthest point from the pavilion, limiting its appeal. There are no local cricket clubs with a desire to make this a regular place to play.

The decision requested is for the approval to remove the provision of the cricket square and outfield at Whitelands and explore the options of providing additional formal grass pitch sports provision. Oxfordshire Cricket Board (OCB) have been involved in these discussions and have agreed off site mitigation through enhancement of cricket facilities at Fringford Cricket Club.

1. Recommendations

Portfolio Holder (Cllr Smith) resolves:

- 1.1 The removal of cricket provision at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground which will be mitigated at Fringford Cricket Club,
- 1.2 The re-purposing of this space for increasing formal grass pitch sports provision at the site particularly for Rugby

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 An opportunity has been identified to increase the provision of grass pitch facilities, particularly rugby in Bicester which will support with the loss of facilities at the Oxford Road.

Bicester Rugby Club's preference for having Whitelands Farm Sports Ground as their home is one of the other factors in bringing forward this decision, however other formal sports can benefit from this change of use.

A decision is required so the Council can approve the re-purposing of the current cricket facilities at Whitelands Farm Ground to support the increase of grass pitch provision on the site.

Following consultation with the OCB (Oxfordshire Cricket Board) who are best placed to advise on cricket in the local area, the OCB are content with the re-purposing of the cricket facility at Whitelands due to the lack of usage and no interest locally. The proposal includes mitigating the loss of the cricket facility by enhancing provision at Fringford Cricket Club. Fringford is a club in rural Bicester which is actively developing cricket in the locality.

Any repurposing of the cricket pitch at Whitelands will be funded through s106 funds specifically for improving and enhancing leisure provision in Bicester

- 2.2 Wellbeing consulted with CDC legal services to ensure there are no additional requirements in terms of the s106 agreement and the original wording is broad enough that there is no need for a Deed of Variation to the original s106 to allow the proposed change of use.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	The repurposing of the cricket space at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground has no financial implications as the works will be funded through approved S106 contributions. Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 09 July 2026
Legal	The report sets out that further legal agreements are not needed to enable removal of the cricket pitch. The pooled contributions that are being used to fund the enhancements to Fringford Cricket Club should be checked to ensure that they are able to be used for this purpose, and the same check should be carried out for any s106 contributions used for the proposed rugby pitches. Legal services will continue to provide support as needed. Rebecca Wise, Trainee Solicitor, 24 August 2026

Risk Management	There is a low risk of concern regarding the loss of cricket provision of Whitelands. This is mitigated by the lack of demand for the facility and the agreed investment in alternative cricket provision at Fringford Cricket Club. The proposal will help meet identified demand for other pitch sports in Bicester. Any risks related to the proposal will be managed through the service operational risk. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team leader, 09 July 2026			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		Not applicable
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		Not applicable
Climate & Environmental Impact		X		Not applicable
ICT & Digital Impact		X		Not applicable
Data Impact		X		
Procurement & subsidy		X		
Council Priorities	Community Leadership – provision of spaces for outdoor sport promotes active lifestyles, fostering healthy communities and promoting wellbeing.			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	The proposal has been discussed with the relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport (Cricket and Rugby), to agree a route forward to ensure the proposals meet the strategic need for the provision of both cricket and rugby in the locality.			

	CDC discussed the proposal with Bicester Town Council who currently operate the site, to ensure there have been no requests for the use of the cricket facility at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground.
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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

Facilities provided on site includes, Grass Rugby Pitches, Grass Football Pitches, a 3G Football Association/World Rugby Compliant Artificial Pitch, Cricket Pitch, Outdoor Gym Equipment and associated Changing Rooms.

Function Rooms, Bar and Catering Facilities are located on the 1st Floor of the Building

The Sports Ground is an integral part of the leisure provision within Bicester ensuring local clubs and sporting organisations are able to access facilities for match and training purposes

- 3.2 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.

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 a management company as well as taking on a long-term lease for the site.

- 3.3 Lease arrangements were agreed between the District Council and Bicester Town Council which are still waiting to be formally executed.

4. Details

- 4.1 Bicester Rugby Club (BRC) have relocated from their previous home at Bicester Sports Association, Oxford Road to Whitelands Farm Sports Ground and have been

supported in this transition by the Council. Whilst this proposal is to increase formal sports provision it is expected that the primary beneficiary will be BRC

- 4.2 The previously commissioned Cherwell Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) identifies the need for a long-term usage agreement between Bicester Town Council and Bicester RUFC which this proposal will help form.
- 4.3 The club currently has access to two full sized grass pitches at Whitelands, which CDC has installed floodlights to, and a full-sized rugby compliant 3G facility which is available for hire, albeit shared with local football clubs.
- 4.4 The repurposing of the current cricket pitch will assist with the ambitions of providing a long-term home for Bicester Rugby and support with capacity issues
- 4.5 This is further supported by CDC's current project to install a second full-size 3G pitch at Whiteland for football usage to enable greater rugby use of the existing pitch and to reduce localised shortfalls.

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: Maintain the cricket provision at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground. This option was rejected as there has been no use or request for use since Whitelands opened in 2017.

Option 2: Re-purpose the cricket facility to increase rugby provision at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground without mitigation.

This option was rejected as Oxfordshire Cricket / England and Wales Cricket Board opposed the loss of a cricket facility without enhancement of another facility in the locality.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 In conclusion, the recommendation is to re-purpose the cricket facility at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground to enhance the provision for formal sports pitches at the site. The recommendation also includes mitigating the loss of the cricket facility at Fringford Cricket Club, in line with strategic objectives identified by Oxfordshire Cricket.

Decision Information

Key Decision	No, the current cricket facility at Whitelands Farm Sports Ground has no intended use for cricket due to lack of interest in hiring.
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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	Map of Whitelands showing the current layout of the sports provision.
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Helen Mack – Senior Community Infrastructure Officer
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Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services – Kristian Aspinall