



**EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
PLAYING PITCH & OUTDOOR SPORT STRATEGY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OCTOBER 2025**

EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL: PLAYING PITCH AND OUTDOOR SPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) has been jointly commissioned by East Hertfordshire Council (EHC), North Hertfordshire Council (NHC) and Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) to develop a Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) for each individual local authority area.

The commission also encompasses an Indoor Built Facilities Strategy for all three councils and an Open Space Study for EHC. This document focuses solely on the East Hertfordshire District Council PPOSS.

This is the executive summary for the PPOSS for East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC). Both the Assessment Report and Strategy have been produced in accordance with Sport England guidance and have achieved sign off from national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and Sport England through a Steering Group.

The PPOSS provides a comprehensive evidence base and strategic framework for outdoor sports provision in East Hertfordshire. It aligns with Sport England's PPS Guidance/Assessing Needs & Opportunities Guide and supports the District Plan (2018–2033). The strategy aims to protect, enhance, and provide facilities to meet current and future demand, ensuring inclusive, high-quality provision for health and wellbeing.

Scope

The scope of the PPOSS focuses geographically on all local provision, regardless of ownership and management arrangements. Provision included within the project is as follows:

- ✦ Football
- ✦ Football (3G pitches)
- ✦ Rugby union
- ✦ Rugby league
- ✦ Hockey (artificial grass pitches AGPs)
- ✦ Cricket
- ✦ Tennis
- ✦ Athletics
- ✦ Lawn bowls
- ✦ Water sports
- ✦ Golf

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SPORT BY SPORT SUMMARIES

Football:

- There are 184 grass pitches of which 178 are open to community use.
- As a breakdown in quality 16% of pitches are good, 53% standard, 31% poor.
- There are 511 teams, including 44 women/girls' teams.
- There are shortfalls in youth 11v11 and 9v9 pitch formats.
- 3G pitches: There is a current shortfall of four 11v11 3G pitches. Future demand based on ONS projections increases the shortfall to 4.75 3G pitches.

Rugby union:

- There are 53 pitches in the Authority, of which 42 are open to community use.
- There are four clubs in the Authority which generates demand of 63 teams.
- There is a current shortfall of 20.75 match equivalent sessions for rugby union.
- Key issues: improving pitch quality, utilising education sites to reduce shortfalls, increasing the number of sports lit pitches where possible and supporting Bishop's Stortford RFC, Hertford RFC and Datchworth RFC in enhancing ancillary facilities.

Cricket:

- There are 46 natural turf squares across 30 sites.
- There are 23 clubs which collectively provide 108 teams.
- There is a shortfall in provision for Saturday peak time demand (-29 match equivalent sessions), future shortfall -41 match equivalent sessions.
- Spare capacity midweek/Sunday; five disused squares could be reinstated.

Hockey:

- There are eight full size AGPs across six sites. Seven of the full size AGPs are open to community use and sports lit. Both Bishop's Stortford College and Simon Balle School need resurfacing.
- Bishop's Stortford HC and Hertford HC are the two clubs in the district which has the combined demand of 28 senior teams and 30 junior teams across all ages.
- The three pitches used for Saturday peak time demand are Herts & Essex Sports Centre, Hockerhill Anglo-European College and Simon Balle School.
- With the combined demand from clubs within East Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Stevenage there is the need for a new full size AGP to service all three authorities.

Tennis/padel:

- There are 135 courts of which 116 are open to community use.
- There are 13 clubs in the Authority. Total known membership figures equates to 1,432 senior members and 820 junior members giving a total figure of 2,252 members.
- The LTA Padel calculator indicates there is demand for 12 Padel courts in East Hertfordshire. There are currently two courts at Bishop's Stortford Sports Trust, meaning new provision is needed to meet the needs of the Authority.

Netball:

- There are 81 courts of which 55 are open to community use. Only 31 of the courts are open to community use and sports lit.
- The Bishop's Stortford District Netball League and Hertford and District Netball League have 30 clubs identified as competing within both leagues.
- This is a good level of supply for the district and seems to service the demand well.

Athletics:

- The Wodson Park Sports Centre track adequately meets the needs of the Authority. The track was last resurfaced in 2005 and has a TrackMark accreditation until March

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2026. At this point the track will likely need respraying in order to retain its certification.

Lawn bowls:

- ◆ There are 13 greens across 13 sites.
- ◆ There are 14 clubs in the Authority. Where membership figures are known there are 560 members across 11 clubs, giving an average membership of 56 individuals.
- ◆ Buntingford BC, Datchworth BC, Hertford Castle BC and Shire Park BC are all operating above Bowls England capacity guidelines.

Golf:

- ◆ There is a good variety of golf courses within the Authority. The existing facilities are clearly servicing demand as evidenced by high membership figures cross each site.

Water sports:

- ◆ The Authority is well serviced with facilities such as River Stort, Abbots Lake and Ware Priority Lido.

Rugby league:

- ◆ There are no pitches within the Authority.
- ◆ There are no clubs in the Authority and demand is exported to North Herts Crusaders RLFC or St Albans Centurions RLFC.

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SPORT BY SPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of relevant scenarios have been tested against key issues for each sport, resulting the following recommendations.

Football – grass pitches

- ◆ Protect the existing quantity of pitches (unless replacement provision meets NPPF and Sport England Playing Field Policy requirements and is agreed upon and provided).
- ◆ Where pitches are overplayed and assessed as poor or standard quality, prioritise investment and review maintenance regimes to ensure it is of an appropriate standard to sustain use and improve quality.
- ◆ Utilise the Football Foundation's PitchPower app to assist in the improvement and ongoing maintenance of provision.
- ◆ Work to accommodate future demand at sites which are not operating at capacity.
- ◆ Seek to regain access to Albury Football Ground where access was removed from BSC FC, mid-season.
- ◆ Improve ancillary facilities where there is a demand to do so and where it can benefit the wider footballing offer, such as Hertford Heath Playing Fields (Hertford Heath FC) where the Club is looking to use its pitch for non-league football; Richard Hale School to support Bury Rangers FC and Watton-at-Stone FC with developing a new site.
- ◆ Where appropriate, help to facilitate partnerships and/or lease arrangements with large, sustainable, development-minded clubs to manage its own sites.
- ◆ Work to obtain more formal community use agreements at education sites listed in table 4.12 so clubs can have longer security of tenure.

3G pitches

- ◆ Protect current stock of 3G pitches.
- ◆ Work with relevant partners to deliver additional 3G pitches in the district to cater for football training demand and reduce shortfalls.
- ◆ Work with partners such as the FA, FF, the RFU, Sport England and other NGBs as applicable to identify the most suitable locations to build new 3G pitches to alleviate known shortfalls.
- ◆ Ensure that any new 3G pitches have community use agreements in place.
- ◆ Ensure that all other 11v11 and larger smaller sized pitches remain on the FA register and are re-tested every three years to sustain certification.
- ◆ Ensure all current and future providers have in place a sinking fund to ensure long-term sustainability.
- ◆ Ensure that all new 3G pitches are constructed to meet FA recommended dimensions and quality performance standards.
- ◆ Monitor supply and demand via Stage E meetings, to better understand the impact on the future 3G need enabling partners to clarify whether the shortfall position is being addressed or increasing.
- ◆ Look to increase the number of 3G pitches within East Hertfordshire at relevant sites by using the findings from the PPOSS and the 2025 LFFP, with priority sites such as Watton YFC new site, The Bury and The Sele School.
- ◆ Look to transfer mini demand from grass pitches to 3G in line with the FA ambition for 50% of all mini match play to take place on 3G pitches.

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Cricket

- ◆ Protect existing quantity of cricket squares.
- ◆ Retain a supply of disused sites to serve as a strategic reserve for future demand.
- ◆ Improve quality at sites assessed as poor and standard quality and ensure quality is sustained at sites assessed as good through partnership working with HCCC.
- ◆ Address overplay via quality improvements and consideration of hybrid wickets in the future.
- ◆ Pursue improved security of tenure for clubs without ownership or a long-term lease arrangement in place, particularly those engaging in lease renewals.
- ◆ Improve the changing and ancillary facilities where there is a need to do so, with priorities placed Thorley CC, St Margaretsbury CC, and Town Fields (Sawbridgeworth CC).
- ◆ Consider options to increase and improve stock of suitable practice facilities, as six clubs raise the need for additional training facilities at its home sites.
- ◆ Continue to support ECB initiatives such as All Stars and Dynamos and ensure unaffiliated demand and recreational cricket is provided for.
- ◆ Undertake PitchPower assessments at sites to support clubs in accessing ECB Grass Pitch Improvement Fund.
- ◆ Look to reinstate disused and un-used provision as a means of increasing the total number of squares in the Authority.

Rugby union

- ◆ Protect the existing quantity of rugby union pitches including those used for curricular and extra-curricular demand.
- ◆ Support clubs in taking part in the GMA pitch advisory service to explore technical requirements to improve pitch quality to address overplay.
- ◆ Work with clubs to improve its ancillary offering.
- ◆ Look to increase the number of sports lit pitches with priority placed on a further sports lit senior pitch at Hertford RFC.
- ◆ Ensure that any residential development considers potential increases in demand for the sport and that new provision or contributions are properly sought through utilisation of the Sport England Playing Pitch Calculator.
- ◆ Support Bishop's Stortford RFC, Hertford RFC and Datchworth RFC in improving the ancillary provisions provided.
- ◆ Ensure once the WR compliant 3G pitch is open for use, that community use is utilised to its full potential, with Bishop's Stortford RFC making the most sense to be a partner club.
- ◆ Explore options at education sites such as St Edmunds College & Prep School and the Bishop's Stortford College to utilise senior rugby pitches to reduce overall shortfalls across the District.

Hockey

- ◆ Protect the sand based AGPs at Herts & Essex Sports Centre, Simon Balle School and Hockerill Anglo-European College for continued hockey use.
- ◆ Work with partners to provide replacement surfaces to the AGPs at Simon Balle School and Bishop's Stortford College.
- ◆ Ensure all hockey suitable AGPs have a sinking fund in place for its eventual refurbishment.
- ◆ Consider an additional hockey suitable AGP in East Hertfordshire as the current stock is at capacity for peak time usage and is inhibiting hockey growth in the District.

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- ◀ Explore a community use agreement at St Edmunds College & Prep School which is only eight miles away from Simon Balle School and could provide a good option to increase affiliated hockey participation in East Hertfordshire. If the school has spare capacity at peak time on Saturday's it could be more feasible than a new pitch.
- ◀ The steering group will explore a feasibility study comparing options for a new sports lit hockey suitable AGP.
- ◀ Enhance the changing rooms at Hockerill Anglo-European College which are of a poor quality and highlighted as in need of improving. This will support both Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club and curricular use.

Rugby league

- ◀ If any demand does exist for rugby league in East Hertfordshire, if not already, it should be signposted to North Herts Crusaders and St Albans Centurions.

Tennis/padel

- ◀ Protect existing quantity of courts.
- ◀ Improve court quality at sites assessed as poor or standard quality and sustain quality at sites assessed as good, especially at sites in use by clubs or that are (or could be) well used for recreational demand.
- ◀ Sustain park courts quality as a priority to create a year-round recreational tennis option to meet local demand.
- ◀ Explore options to further improve the recreational tennis offer via utilisation of technology provided by the LTA (e.g., ClubSpark) to support the customer journey and through investment into facilities and accompanying ancillary provision.
- ◀ Ensure sinking funds are put into place by providers for long-term sustainability.
- ◀ Explore installation of additional sports lighting at club-based venues, such as Aston Tennis Club and Datchworth Tennis Club. Tewin Tennis Club currently uses portable sports lighting and would like to upgrade. Sawbridgeworth Tennis Club would also like to upgrade its lighting to LED.
- ◀ Support the development of new Padel courts as a means of addressing the shortfall of Padel provision in the Authority.

Lawn bowls

- ◀ Protect existing quantity of currently used greens and, as a minimum, sustain quality.
- ◀ Ensure that any proposed development of currently used greens is mitigated in line with NPPF.
- ◀ Assist clubs, where possible, with any future ancillary provision improvements such as Shire Park BC, Hertford Castle BC and Sele Farm BC.
- ◀ Monitor capacity levels of highly supported clubs such as Buntingford BC and Hertford Castle BC to ensure they have sufficient capacity.
- ◀ Support clubs with plans to increase membership so that growth can be maximised.

Athletics

- ◀ Ensure the track and supporting facilities at the Wodson Park Sports Centre are retained with a priority placed on resurfacing the track to maintain UKA TrackMark accreditation.
- ◀ The compact track at Hockerill Anglo-European College is retained and remains in good condition for as long as possible.
- ◀ Support clubs, running groups, events and England Athletics initiatives such as Park Run and pursue increased participation, where possible.

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- ◀ Continue to increase participation both within affiliated clubs and the wider running market, signposting potential club members from the likes of Parkrun events and other health initiatives.
- ◀ Consider the need to include 'Active Tracks' within strategic housing allocations to provide a health and wellbeing offer on site.

Netball

- ◀ Protect quantity of courts.
- ◀ Seek to improve poor quality courts quality through resurfacing or improved maintenance.
- ◀ Explore options to increase sports lighting across East Hertfordshire.
- ◀ Open discussions with sites that already allow community use of other facilities to determine whether provision could be opened for community use, such as Birchwood High School and The Sele School.
- ◀ Look to continue and expand the use of courts for England Netball initiatives such as Back to Netball and Walking Netball.
- ◀ Facilitate improved engagement between England Netball and schools.
- ◀ Look to install sports lights to the provision at The Birchwood High School and The Sele School as a means of increasing the total number of sports lit courts.

Golf

- ◀ Protect and retain all existing golf provision unless separate needs assessments are completed that evidence that a facility can be lost or reduced without it impacting upon demand.
- ◀ Sustain course and ancillary facility quality and seek improvements where necessary.
- ◀ Support clubs in membership retention and potential growth and encourage clubs and providers to work more collaboratively in terms of creating pathways for players.

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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. **Protect** all existing facilities, including disused/poor sites, until shortfalls are addressed.
2. **Enhance** quality through maintenance programmes (e.g., GMA Pitch Advisory Service, PitchPower app) and ancillary upgrades.
3. **Provide** new facilities where required, prioritising:
 - ♦ Additional 3G pitches, current shortfall of four 11v11 3G pitches.
 - ♦ New full-size hockey AGP to service East Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Stevenage.
 - ♦ Padel courts, need to develop 10 new courts to service demand.
4. **Secure tenure and access** via long-term leases and formal community use agreements, especially at education sites.
5. **Maximise developer contributions** using Sport England's Playing Pitch Calculator; prioritise multi-pitch/multi-sport hubs.
6. **Inclusive and sustainable provision**, ensuring accessibility for women, girls, and under-represented groups.

Delivering the Strategy

The Strategy Report has presented a thorough Action Plan with recommendations for every site. This covers all playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities covered within the scope.

The PPOSS seeks to provide the necessary robustness and direction to ensure that the Council has a framework for the prioritisation, provision and development of sports facilities across the public, private and independent sectors. It covers all formal playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities across the authority area to assist it to strategically plan for the future.

It is important that the steering group undertakes regular monitoring of the PPOSS and reviews how the position has changed since the adoption of the report. This monitoring should be led by the local authority and supported by all members of the steering group. If no review and subsequent update has been carried out within three years, Sport England and the NGBs will consider the PPS and the information on which it is based to be out of date.