

Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee

15 July 2025

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Cabinet - Non-key Decision



Cabinet Member	Cllr Mike Taylor, Cabinet Member for Planning and Cllr Des Keers, Cabinet Member for Community Services
Responsible Officer	Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health
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Sports Facilities Evidence

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To outline the Council's emerging approach to maintaining and enhancing sports facilities in the borough through the adoption of the Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy and the Playing Pitches and Outdoor Sports Facilities Strategy.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

- 2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.
- 2.2 This priority includes a commitment to 'promote well-being and help people, especially our most vulnerable residents, to live healthy and active lifestyles. This includes facilitating good quality leisure facilities and services across Tonbridge and Malling'. This report provides a strategic framework against which to take relevant actions and to judge proposals for sports facilities.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 ENDORSE the reports and RECOMMEND to Cabinet that they approve the adoption of these as the Council's current policy position on sports facilities
- 3.2 DELEGATE authority to the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Planning and Community Services, to publish Stage E reviews of these reports to update the position to help inform the Local Plan and other Council workstreams.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 The Local Plan process requires an evidence base led approach to ensuring the delivery of sustainable development to support existing and new communities. Access to and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities and there is a national policy requirement for planning policies to be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for sport and recreation facilities.
- 4.2 Both the Indoor Sports and Playing Pitch strategy reports were progressed in 2024. The future needs assessment is therefore based on the Council's housing need at that time of 839 dwellings per annum to understand future deficits in provision. The new NPPF published in December 2025 provides a housing need figure of 1090 per annum, an increase of 251 dwellings per year. Given the increase, this therefore requires further testing to understand whether and what additional facilities, to that which have been identified in the report already, should be sought to support future development. Further work is therefore required to provide a more up-to-date position.
- 4.3 Sport England Guidance for progressing indoor sports strategies and playing pitch strategies provides a five-stage approach to assessments. Stages A - D have been undertaken as presented in the reports. There is a further stage, stage E, and this provides an opportunity for monitoring and review of the assessments undertaken. In discussions with Sports England and our consultants, we will utilise this part of the Sport England methodology to update and review the work undertaken to date and this review will be undertaken alongside the development of the local plan at an appropriate time to align with plan-making to ensure that evidence is as up to date as possible. Ahead of this and for now, the report provides a strong basis for supporting policy making and decision making given that any updated report is likely to require more, not less, facilities to absorb the demand from an increase in population, over and above that set out in the report. A Stage E report will therefore further justify the protection, enhancement and requirement for new provision of facilities, given that a population increase will increase demand.
- 4.4 In addition to the need to progress a Stage E review to account for increased housing need, stage E provides an opportunity to understand supply and demand changes in sports provision. There are a number of sports related developments under consideration in the borough at present that have an impact on the timing of bringing this report to Members at this time and ahead of the Stage E review;
- 4.4.1 The Council has made a decision to replace the existing Angel Centre in Tonbridge Town Centre, which is referenced in the Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy. This report indicates that these facilities are required to maintain current levels of accessibility to facilities.

- 4.4.2 The K Sports site has recently changed ownership and is subject to a planning application process at present. The site has previously been utilised by several amateur sports clubs, some based in the borough and others in neighbouring areas. Understanding any potential need for community/amateur facility access is therefore important to sports provision in the north of the borough.
- 4.4.3 The Council owns the freehold of the Tonbridge Farm site, which houses several sporting uses, including an all-weather pitch, football pitches and the Tonbridge Angels stadium. Discussions are underway about the renewal of facilities at this site and the Council wishes to work in partnership with the Club as the leaseholder of the Longmead Stadium to ensure that a sustainable and deliverable set of proposals come forward for the site.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 It is proposed that these strategies are adopted by the Council as its current policy position on Sports Facilities. This will maximise the Council's ability to support and develop key facilities across the borough, particularly where there are significant potential changes to facilities already proposed and in some case in the Council's ownership.
- 5.2 These strategies will be able to inform the negotiation of s106 agreements where development would impact on facility use and may drive a requirement for a contribution towards enhancement or replacement.
- 5.3 Given that the Council will need to progress a Stage E review of these reports shortly to support the local plan process, it is proposed that the ability to publish the Stage E report to the relevant area of the Council's website, in order to ensure that up to date considerations are in use for any discussions where these reports are being used as evidence to support the Council's position, is delegated to the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Planning and Community Services. This will ensure that timely updates, where they are considered to fall within the more general delegations to the Director and Cabinet Members for amendments to adopted policies, can be carried out. However, these reports will still form part of the evidence base presented to Members for Regulation 18 and 19 stages of the Local Plan.

6 Other Options

- 6.1 The Council could choose to wait until the Regulation 18 consultation takes place to have these strategies form part of its policy / evidence framework. However, this would mean that any development that is approved in the intervening time period would be a missed opportunity to potentially secure contributions towards facilities or to ensure that any developments or lettings take into account identified needs.

7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 7.1 In any planning application process, viability considerations would play a role in the securing of contributions. The Sports England Facilities Calculator would be utilised as a starting point for such considerations.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 There is a risk that the Council misses opportunities to secure contributions for sports facilities whilst the Local Plan is being prepared if there is not an established position against which to measure any impacts from development.
- 8.2 Whilst the above relates specifically to planning processes, there may also be missed opportunities for the Council to take on a community leadership role in advocating for particular grassroots sports opportunities.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 There are no specific Legal implications arising from these proposals that are not already identified and managed through either Local Plan or Development Management processes.

10 Consultation and Communications

- 10.1 The updated strategies will be published as part of the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation in Autumn 2025.

11 Implementation

- 11.1 If approved, the strategies will be published on the Council's website. There will also be a staff briefing for relevant staff in Planning and Legal to ensure that these provisions are embedded into relevant working practices.

12 Cross Cutting Issues

12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 12.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have not been considered at this strategy development stage. Any development or extension of facilities would be required via their planning application process to consider these matters.
- 12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

12.2 Equalities and Diversity

- 12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users due to the fact that all facilities would be expected to take into account

accessibility and other equalities requirements during their development processes.

12.3 Other If Relevant

- Healthy Lifestyles

12.3.1 The protection, development and enhancement of sporting facilities contributes to the aim of ensuring that residents can have healthy lifestyles.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Facilities Strategy