



Subject:	Pitches Update
Date:	18 th September 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales – Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services Sinead Grimes – Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	David Sales - Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services Sinead Grimes – Director of Property & Projects

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number ☐	
1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	☐
After Council Decision	☐
Sometime in the future	☐
Never	☐

Call-in
Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	<u>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</u>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work ongoing in respect of pitches including the Pitches Strategy.

2.0	<u>Recommendation</u>
2.1	The Committee is asked to note: - the update on the Pitches Strategy Consultation - the update on current minor pitch improvement projects and agree the proposed projects for this year as outlined at 3.5 - that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being commissioned to inform the development of a costed maintenance programme; - that a detailed report will be brought to Committee next month with further detail on the £1m Partner Enhancement Fund, Pitches Implementation Plan and Events Space - that a response has been received from the Minister for Communities regarding the requirements under the new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League criteria and agree that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Pitch Strategy 2026 - 2036 Consultation</u>
3.1	At its meeting on 30th April 2026, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee noted the contents of the draft Pitches Strategy 2026 – 2036 and approved that the draft Strategy would be subject to formal consultation which would also consider any equality implications. Members will be aware of the significant consultation and engagement that has been undertaken as part of the work on the Pitches Strategy and on the agreed overarching Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy. The former included co-design, online surveys, as well as further focused surveys, public consultation events and interviews.
3.2	Members are asked to note that it is anticipated the consultation will open for 8 weeks via the Yoursay platform in mid-October, closing in December 2026. An equality screening document will also accompany the consultation along with a FAQ document.
3.3	It is estimated that feedback from the consultation will be brought back to Members in February 2027.
	<u>Pitch Projects – Developments already undertaken or planned for 2026/2027</u>
3.4	Alongside the development of the Pitches Strategy, officers have progressed a number of initiatives which have previously been agreed by Members. These are designed to improve pitch provision across the city, using the Pitches Programme budget allocated. These include: - Clarendon Playing Fields: Installation of two 6m x 30m long ballstop fences at the grass soccer pitch. Works were completed in March 2026.

	- Fall Park: Installation of 1.2m high spectator fence, 6m high ballstop sections and spectator hardstanding at grass soccer pitch. Works are progressing well, completion expected by end of September 2026. - Wedderburn Playing Fields: Installation of 2.4m high boundary fence and 1.2m high spectator fence. Works are programmed to commence in October 2026, with completion expected by December 2026. In this regard, a meeting for local councillors will be organised for the end of September with consultation sessions at the start of October. - Marrowbone 3G Pitch: Installation of 1.0m high ballstop netting system to the existing ballstop fence. Fencing is now on order with works programmed to commence in November 2026, completion is expected by mid-December 2026.
3.5	Furthermore, the following projects are proposed to be taken forward utilising the allocated Pitches Programme budget. Again these are small scale works designed to improve pitch provision across the city. - Woodlands Playing Fields: Creation of additional junior GAA pitch, installation of 3no. ballstop nets, 1.2m fence to car park and new player access ramp to the pitch area. - Cherryvale Park: Surface improvement work to existing grass GAA training pitch and installation of dugout areas. - Henry Jones Playing Fields: Installation of 2no. player dugouts. - Loughside Playing Fields: Installation of 4m high ballstop fence to boundary of small sided, grass soccer pitch. - Westlands Soccer Pitch (Waterworks Upper): Construction of new spectator hardstanding at grass soccer pitch. - Dixon Park: Installation of additional 1.2m high spectator fencing with ballstop section and new car park kerbing. - Strangford Playing Fields: Installation of ballstop nets. - Brook 4G – following a condition survey of the playing surface at Brook, a re-crumbing exercise will be completed to improve the playing surface. Members are asked to agree the minor pitch improvement projects outlined above. If agreed works will be carried out by end of March 2027.
	<u>Partner Enhancement Fund – Update</u>
3.6	At February 2026 Committee, Members agreed to ringfence £1million from the current Pitches Programme budget towards a Partner Pitch Enhancement Programme. This Fund is aimed at supporting partner organisations, who can demonstrate projects with community benefits, that will provide increased pitch availability to help address the deficit of pitch hours, as outlined in the Pitches Strategy. Work on this is being finalised and Members are asked to note that further

	detail will be brought back to Committee next month, outlining the open-call application process, eligibility criteria and assessment process.
	<u>Condition Surveys</u>
3.7	Members will be aware that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being carried out across the Council's buildings with surveys currently underway of all the community centres. This is to inform the development of a full evidence based planned maintenance programme. To ensure that the Council has a full understanding of all future maintenance requirements it is proposed that a programme of condition surveys of the Council's pitches both grass and 3G is undertaken.
3.8	A spec for this work is currently being finalised and an update on the timeline will be brought to Committee as part of a future update.
	<u>National Conference League – DFC response</u>
3.9	Recent proposals presented by new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League facility criteria, was discussed at the special SP&R (30th April 2026). The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to engage the IFA in relation to the impact on football clubs on the level of pitches available that meet this criteria and request that interventions are made.
3.10	A response has been received from the Minister for Communities, indicating that whilst he does not have any direct influence over the structures, criteria or regulations governing leagues, he will support the continued engagement with Irish FA and league operators, around the impact of the onerous and challenging facility requirements introduced. A copy of this is attached at Appendix 1. It is proposed that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.
	<u>Next Steps</u>
3.11	Members are asked to note the work that has been ongoing in respect of pitches and note that it is proposed to bring a detailed update to Committee next month covering - Pitches Strategy – Implementation Plan – proposed next steps following the outcome of the feasibility studies - Proposed procurement strategy - Update on the Event Space - extensive work on this piece of work has been undertaken and extensive engagement with promoters and other key stakeholders has taken place, with continued dialogue ongoing. - Continue to engage with Minister for Communities and Northern Ireland Amateur Football League regarding new requirements under the Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League and officers to meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.12	None in relation to this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.13	The legislation requirements have been met including screening. All physical projects are designed for people and are inherently inclusive and accessible.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Correspondence received from Minister for Communities re Belfast Playing Pitches