


# Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy Update 2026

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides an updated evidence base for Colchester City Council (CCC) on playing pitches and outdoor sports in 2026.

1.2 In accordance with guidance, updates to the strategy are required on a five-year cycle. However, this review is being undertaken at the two-year point to align with the Local Plan review and ensure strategic consistency and where the local plan and policies can support playing pitch and outdoor sport requirements.

1.3 It serves as the first formal update to the following previous document:

- Colchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy & Action Plan 2023
- Colchester Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy Assessment Report 2023

1.4 In line with Sport England's guidance, "An approach to developing and delivering a playing pitch strategy," this review highlights:

- Progress made on delivering previous recommendations and adjustments to action priorities.
- Applications of the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and lessons learned
- Changes in key sites, clubs, supply and demand, and their implications
- Developments in specific sports or new formats
- Emerging issues and opportunities for provision and investment

1.5 This document follows the recommended approach and should be read in conjunction with the original strategy and assessment report from 2023.

1.6 Multiple partner organisations, including sports clubs, schools, and local networks, play a vital role in delivering the strategy. Although Colchester City Council (CCC) leads the review, the document is intended for collective use by all relevant stakeholders.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The 2023 Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS) for Colchester focused on the following sports facility types:

- Football
- Third Generation Turf (3G) Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs)
- Cricket
- Rugby Union
- Rugby League
- Tennis
- Netball
- Hockey
- Golf
- Bowls

- Athletics
- Cycling
- Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs)

2.2 The original study was jointly commissioned with Tendring District Council, however, the Colchester Playing Pitch Strategy documents and this uptate, reviews only the facilities within the administrative boundary of CCC.

2.3 To assess changes since 2023, national governing bodies (NGBs) and stakeholders were surveyed regarding supply, demand, and issues specific to their sport.

**Table of stakeholder engagement per sport:**

| Sport | Organisation | Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| Football | Essex FA, Colchester CC | Governing body and local authority |
| 3G AGPs | Essex FA, Colchester CC | Governing body and local authority |
| Cricket | Essex Cricket, Local Clubs | Governing body and local clubs |
| Rugby Union | Rugby Football Union RFU | Governing body |
| Rugby League | Rugby Football League RFL | Governing body |
| Bowls | Bowls England | Governing body |
| Tennis | Lawn Tennis Association, Colchester CC | Governing body |
| Netball | England Netball | Governing body |
| Athletics | England Athletics | Governing body |
| Hockey | England Hockey | Governing body |
| Golf | England Golf | Governing body |
| Cycling | British Cycling, Colchester CC | Governing body and local authority |

2.4 Each sport was reviewed using the following framework:

- **Supply Update** – Captures facility changes and aligns with Sport England's aims to protect, enhance and provide.
- **Demand Update** – Compares 2023 and 2025 participation data
- **Significant Issues** – Highlights sport-specific developments or challenges
- **Summary and Conclusions** – Informs recommendations and potential action plan revisions

2.5 A sample of the stakeholder survey used to gather updates can be found in **Appendix 1**.

## 3. Football

### 3.1 Demand Update

| Football Team Groups | 2023 Number of Teams | 2025 Number of Teams |
|---|---|---|
| **Men 11v11 (16-45yrs)** | 147 | 69 (6 vets) |
| **Women 11v11 (16-45yrs)** | 7 | 10 |
| **Youth Boys 11v11 (12-15yrs)** | 118 | 98 |
| **Youth Girls 11v11 (12-15yrs)** | | 19 |
| **Boys 9v9 (10-11yrs)** | 57 | 61 |
| **Girls 9v9 (10-11yrs)** | | 11 |
| **Mixed 7v7 (8-9yrs)** | 51 | 73 (9 girls) |
| **Mixed 5v5 (6-7yrs)** | 28 | 50 (2 girls) |
| **Total** | **408** | **391** |

*Note: 2023 data did not disaggregate all youth girls' teams by 11v11 or 9v9 formats.*

- Significant reduction in men's adult teams since 2023 down 53%.
- A small increase in adult women.
- 11v11 groups same, however greater increase in 9v9, 7v7 and 5v5 teams since 2023.

### 3.2 Supply Update

- Tiptree Heath FC are pursuing new changing room provision.
- West Bergholt FC/ Bergholt Health are pursuing upgrades to toilet facilities at Poor Field in West Bergholt.

### 3.3 Significant Issues for Football

The Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) for Colchester, which was a strategic document created by CCC, Essex FA and the Football Foundation (with local club input) and was published by the FA in November 2024. The LFFP and PPOSS serves as a plan to map out needs for grassroot football facilities with target investment from developer contributions (S106) and grants. Sets a 10-year vision to transform local facilities, improving grass pitches, creating 3G pitches, upgrading changing rooms and developing small-sided spaces; all aiming to boost participation and improve community health and wellbeing.

**Key Findings**

- **Identified Need:** The 2023 PPOSS and 2024 LFFP are used as supporting documents for the Colchester Local Plan and to inform planning policy for new developments like the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC).
- **Funding Mechanism:** The LFFPs are used by the Football Foundation to ensure approximately 90% of its funding targets the highest priority areas identified in

the plans, with the aim of creating a network of 3G pitches and improving grass pitches.
- New mobile goals arrived at Mile End, Shrub End, and Lexden King George Playing Fields, funded by the Football Foundation (£14,700) and Sections 106 money (£21,000) to benefit local teams.
- **Local Authority Commitment:** The plans heavily rely on the local authority to make a financial commitment and provide officer support to deliver projects.
- **Plan Status:** The FA and its partners continue to work with local authorities to turn the LFFPs into reality, with a new national strategy running through to 2030 that leads with 3G pitch development in high-priority areas.

### 3.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Men's football participation has decreased according to difference between 2023 and 2025 team record data, although this was not highlighted in the survey as a significant change to the sport in Colchester.
- Significant increase in youth and women and girls' teams.
- Section 106 contributions from housing developments could potentially help fund additional pitch provision. Revisiting the disused provision could still be considered for new additions especially youth pitches.
- CCC has successfully secured a £35,700 from both the Football Foundation and S106 funding to install 13 new sets of mobile football goals to reduce pitch wear and cancellations.
- The 2023 & 2024 recommendations remain valid and should continue to guide strategy implementation, supplemented by:

    - Proposals for additional 3G facilities. In growth areas around Eight Ash Green, Copford and Marks Tey. North-east Colchester & TCBGC.
    - Proposals for youth pitches or conversions of underutilised adult pitches
    - Club-led investment initiatives
    - Continued collaboration with Essex FA and the Football Foundation

## 4. Third Generation Turf (3G) Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs)

### 4.1 Demand Update

- Demand for overall youth, girls and female football has increased while grass pitch availability has remained static, reinforcing the case for further 3G AGP provision.

### 4.2 Supply Update

- The 2023 PPOSS and 2024 LFFP highlighted a major deficit in 3G AGPs in Colchester relative to demand, positioning them as a top priority for investment.

### 4.3 Significant Issues for 3G AGPs

- There is still a need for additional 3G AGPs in Colchester.
- Multi-sport usage and compliance with both football and rugby regulations are central to new developments.

### 4.4 Summary and Conclusions

- There is still evidence of unmet demand for additional 3G AGP provision in Colchester which highlights increased national funding to deliver improved football facilities, particularly 3G AGPs.
- Increased participation and limited grass pitch expansion require continued focus on expanding 3G AGP provision.
- Strategic planning for dual-sport compliant 3G facilities is recommended.

## 5. Cricket

### 5.1 Demand Update

| Cricket Team Groups | 2023 Number of Teams | 2025 Number of Teams |
|---|---|---|
| **Senior Men (18-55yrs)** | 43 | 57 |
| **Senior Women (18-55yrs)** | 6 | 13 |
| **Junior Boys** | 38 | 50 |
| **Junior Girls** | 2 | 7 |
| **Total** | **89** | **94** |

- Growth in youth cricket continues, from the club responses is shows girls teams have increased.
- The addition of women's teams reflects progress in diversifying participation.
- Overall team numbers have increased since 2023.

### 5.2 Supply Update

- Colchester hosts 30 grass wicket squares across 18 sites, 13 of which are accessible to the community and all of which are at standard or good quality.
- There are 5 standalone non-turf pitches (NTPs) across Colchester, 3 school sites, 1 at the university of Essex and 1 at the Military Corrective Training Centre
- Local club information and facility developments:

    - **Abberton:** Regular updates to ground condition, facilities, club house and new training equipment purchased for all teams. The club is trying to have their outfield levelled and relayed which is an ongoing project.
    - **Boxted:** *Status remains the same*
    - **Chappel & Wakes Colne:** Upgraded changing room provision and now has a separate umpire's changing room which can be used for females or U18s when playing in adult cricket. Ongoing fundraising efforts aim to upgrade the toilets and kitchen facilities, which are in urgent need of replacement. The improvements will include a new accessible toilet, modern showers, and an enhanced kitchen area.

- **Colchester Cavaliers:** Concerns around facility provision being reduced in 2026. The club finds it difficult to book pitches early and late in the season and football is usually given priority. The club has requested (a) artificial pitch and (b) extra storage but hasn't had a response to their emails from the local authority, despite multiple email follow ups. The club house does not have water access and is not able to accommodate two teams.

  Number of players have increased significantly but facilities are not proportional. As mentioned above, the pavilion doesn't have space for 22 players and sometimes there are two games on same days (meaning at least 44 players) and if there are both men and woman in the teams. The teams have increased from 2 to 4 and would need an all-weather artificial pitch to encourage youth participation. A request for an additional square at Mile End ground to be developed as there is growing demand and they can have at least 20 games a season there.

- **Colchester & East Essex:** Outdated Training Facilities: a key community hub that has faced significant challenges with its aging infrastructure. The club's four existing cricket nets were in a poor state and required a complete, costly upgrade, estimated at around £70,000. The club has had to actively fundraise and apply for grants to replace them with modern, ECB-approved facilities to ensure safe practice for members, schools, and visiting teams; the new state-of-the-art net facility has now been constructed and is operational. There are no planned facility developments.

  Despite now having two squares at the Castle Park ground, the club cannot accommodate two home matches when the 1st Xl has a home fixture. On some occasions they have had difficulty in finding another suitable local pitch for the 3rd X1 fixture, which suggests that there is now an under-provision within the locality.

- **Copford:** Introduction of Women's Softball Cricket in 2024 and improvement to access planned September 2025.
- **Dedham:** *Status remains the same*
- **IPSCOL:** As identified from the Labosport Ball Safety Striking Report, Langham is not an option, so the club has no home pitch. Increase in players looking to play league cricket with non-availability of facilities limits the club's ability to cater for the increase.
- **Real Oddies:** *Status remains the same*
- **West Bergholt:** New nets with funding from Enovert.
- **West Mersea:** *Status remains the same*
- **Wivenhoe Town:** Increased accessibility due to installation of a wheelchair ramp to the clubhouse. Increase in girls participation. Installation of solar panels with help of a grant to increase energy efficiency. Continuing to apply for grants and development contributions

to fund significant extensions and upgrades to the clubhouse. Any assistance with protecting the quality of the cricket square and outfield due to the number of matches and training would be appreciated.

### 5.3 Significant Issues for Cricket

- Youth and Women's Participation: While participation rates have shown some positive trends nationally and, in some cases locally, a general challenge for cricket is building a sustainable relationship with young people and increasing the representation of women and girls at all levels of the game.
- Ensuring high-quality, accessible facilities is crucial for maintaining and increasing local participation and talent development, but some clubs struggle with aging infrastructure, limited training facilities or no home for their club.
- Greater school-club engagement is needed to promote cricket locally and attract volunteers.

### 5.4 Summary and Conclusions

- The number of teams has increased significantly since 2023, with growth across age groups and formats.
- Facility upgrades have helped some clubs be more energy efficient and accessible, while others continue to face barriers to growth.
- The 2023 recommendations remain valid but should now also address:

    - Development support for new women's and girls' teams
    - Investment to support clubhouse upgrades and expansions. Particularly with growth around Eight Ash Green, Wivenhoe, Wakes Colne, Mersea and North east Colchester.
    - Active promotion of cricket in schools and partnership-building with local clubs.

## 6. Rugby Union

### 6.1 Demand Update

- Colchester RFC and Mersea RFC both operate within the CCC boundary.
- For 2025, Colchester RFC reports:

| Rugby Union Groups | 2023 Teams | 2025 Teams |
|---|---|---|
| **Senior Men's** | 7 | 8 |
| **Senior Women's** | 1 | 1 |
| **Colt Boys (U17/U18)** | 2 | 2 |
| **Colt Girls (U17/U18)** | 0 | 1 |
| **Junior Boys (U16-U13)** | 9 | 14 |
| **Junior Girls (U16-U13)** | 1 | 1 |
| **Minis (Mixed U12-U6)** | 11 | 10 |
| **Total** | **31** | **37** |

- Figures are based on club submissions and governing body data.
- Success of the Red Roses at the 2025 Rugby World Cup, it is anticipated an increase in demand for women's and girls' rugby.
- Since 2022 Colchester Kings (East Anglia's first gay and inclusive Rugby team) has grown significantly currently with 2 teams and a Touch squad (Colchester Thunders).

### 6.2 Supply Update

- No major changes in pitch supply since 2023.

### 6.3 Significant Issues for Rugby Union

- There are still ongoing issues with the drainage system on the natural turf pitches at Raven Park; they cannot drain sufficiently for the clubs to utilise them fully.
- A Pitch Power report was carried out in February 2024 and found all natural turf pitches to be of a 'basic' standard, as per the pitch quality score (PQS) set out by the Ground Maintenance Association (GMA).
- The RFU has enhanced club support mechanisms, including pitch quality audits and maintenance guidance via a partnership with the GMA.
- England hosted the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2025, which is expected to raise the profile of the sport and increase grassroots demand.

### 6.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Rugby demand in Colchester has remained relatively stable with slight increases in youth and women's categories also a first gay and inclusive Rugby Union club.
- Facilities are largely unchanged, but strategic investment, especially in drainage issues and multi-sport AGPs, could boost capacity and quality.
- The 2023 recommendations remain valid, with particular relevance to:

    - Improving grass pitch quality and drainage.
    - Planning for potential growth in youth and female participation because of Women's Rugby World Cup 2025.

## 7. Rugby League

### 7.1 Demand Update

| Rugby League Groups | 2023 Teams | 2025 Teams |
|---|---|---|
| **Senior Men's** | ? | 2 |
| **Senior Women's** | ? | 1 |
| **Senior Mixed (tag)** | ? | 1 |
| **Junior Boys / Mixed (U17/U18)** | ? | 1 |
| **Junior Boys / Mixed (U15-U16)** | ? | 1 |
| **Junior Boys / Mixed (U14-U13)** | ? | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Junior Boys / Mixed (U12-U11)** | ? | 1 |
| **Primary (Mixed U11-U7)** | ? | 2 |
| **Total** | **?** | **10** |

- Eastern Rhinos RLC are the only rugby league team in the Colchester area.

### 7.2 Supply Update

- No major changes in pitch supply since 2023.

### 7.3 Significant Issues for Rugby League

- There are still ongoing issues with the drainage system on the natural turf pitches at Raven Park; they cannot drain sufficiently for the clubs to utilise them fully.
- No club base in Colchester.

### 7.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Eastern Rhinos RLC are still looking to secure tenure to provide long term security in a base.
- The 2023 recommendations remain valid, with particular relevance to:

    - Supporting tenure security for clubs
    - Improving grass pitch quality and drainage.
    - Planning for potential growth in youth and female participation because of Women's Rugby World Cup 2025.

## 8. Tennis & Padel

### 8.1 Demand Update

| Tennis Team Groups | 2023 Members | 2025 Members |
|---|---|---|
| **Seniors** | 1,254 | ? |
| **Juniors** | 367 | ? |
| **Total** | **1,621** | **?** |

- No member data for 2025 has been provided.

### 8.2 Supply Update

- The 2023 PPOSS identified Colchester as having 12 registered tennis clubs with 122 tennis courts across 26 sites. 88 courts across 16 sites are available for community use compared with 35 courts across 10 sites which are unavailable. However, LTA have stated 8 tennis clubs and 34 courts: Colchester Officers Club (6 tennis courts), Dedham Tennis Club (3 tennis courts), Langham Tennis Club (2 tennis courts), Lexden Hill Lawn Tennis Club (6 tennis courts), Lexden Rackets

and Fitness Club (2 tennis courts), Spring Lane Tennis Club (8 tennis clubs), West Mersea Tennis Club (3 tennis courts), Wivenhoe Tennis Club (4 tennis courts).

- Park Tennis Courts at Colchester Tennis Centre (Leisure World) and 4 outdoor tennis courts have been converted to 3 Padel courts.
- New courts provided at Colchester Trinity Secondary School and 2 at Delta Marriott Hotel.
- The rapid growth in padel participation across the country is exceeding the current pace of court provision and Active Places Power calculator has suggested Colchester could cater for 14 padel courts in line with projected population growth.

### 8.3 Significant Issues for Tennis and Padel

- Unclear on the Tennis and Padel landscape in Colchester as limited response to the update from local teams.
- The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) have measured an increase in Padel demand.

### 8.4 Summary and Conclusions

- LTA continues to support facility upgrades, including access and lighting improvements.
- Unclear on the exact court numbers and participation data for both tennis and padel, including types of teams, to establish where the need for improvements are.
- The following strategic priorities are recommended:

    - Secure long-term community access agreements at newly developed or upgraded sites.
    - Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGB) project could deliver some of the courts identified as projected growth of Padel as part of their sport provision.
    - Need exact figures from all clubs in Colchester's boundary to be able to support any requirements they may have.
    - Need exact court data to know the scale of deficiency in order to meet the estimated demand for 14 padel courts.
    - Maintain collaboration with the LTA to access funding and promote inclusive access to tennis facilities

## 9. Netball

### 9.1 Demand Update

| Age Group | 2023 Teams | 2025 Members |
|---|---|---|
| **Women (Over 18s)** | 48 | ? |
| **Women (U18s)** | 39 | ? |
| **Total** | **87** | **?** |

- No member data for 2025 has been provided.

### 9.2 Supply Update

- There are 63 outdoor netball courts identified in Colchester across 23 sites, of which, 47 are available for community use across 12 sites.
- No major changes in pitch supply since 2023.

### 9.3 Significant Issues for Netball

- Unclear on the Netball landscape in Colchester as no response to this update.

### 9.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Ensuring community access to any new and existing court developments is a key priority.
- Unclear on the exact court numbers and participation data including types of teams, to establish where the need for improvements is.
- Strategic actions include:

    - Implementing formal community use agreements where required
    - Monitoring the success of newly introduced formats like Walking Netball
    - Need exact figures from all clubs in Colchester's boundary to be able to support any requirements they may have.
    - Exploring future facility needs based on demand trends and waiting lists

## 10. Hockey

### 10.1 Demand Update

| Category | 2023 Teams | 2025 Teams |
|---|---|---|
| **Senior Men's** | ? | 5 |
| **Senior Women's** | ? | 4 |
| **Junior Boys (14-16yrs)** | ? | 1 |
| **Junior Boys (11-13yrs)** | ? | 2 |
| **Junior Girls (14-16yrs)** | ? | 1 |
| **Junior Girls (11-13yrs)** | ? | 2 |
| **Mixed (5-10yrs)** | ? | 4 |
| **Total** | **?** | **10** |

- Colchester Hockey Club is the only club in the Colchester area
- Striving to increase the number of junior players.

### 10.2 Supply Update

- No major changes in pitch supply since 2023.

### 10.3 Significant Issues for Hockey

- Harwich & Dovercourt (TDC area) are now playing their home games at the University of Essex due to condition of their previous facility at Dovercourt Leisure Centre.
- Colne HC and Tendring HC have both folded since 2023 update and most of the members joined Colchester HC.
- Pitch at the Garrison needs resurfacing

### 10.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Strategic priorities /possible recommendations:

    - Protecting existing pitches without mitigation.
    - Resurfacing the pitch at the Garrison.

## 11. Golf

### 11.1 Demand Update

| Club Name | 2023 Members | 2025 Members |
|---|---|---|
| **Birch Grove Golf Club** | ? | ? |
| **Colchester Golf Club** | ? | ? |
| **Lexden Wood Golf Club** | ? | ? |
| **Tiptree Golf Driving Range Club** | ? | ? |

- Member data has not been obtained.

### 11.2 Supply Update

- Colchester has 4 affiliated golf clubs: 3 standard hole courses; 2 of which are 18-hole courses (Lexden Wood GC & Colchester GC) and 1 driving range club.
- A family-focused adventure golf facility, Putt in the Park has been introduced within Castle Park.
- No major changes in supply since 2023

### 11.3 Significant Issues for Golf

- Unclear on the Golf landscape in Colchester as no response to this update. ay maintenance and greenkeeping.

### 11.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Facilities are generally coping with demand, but quality improvements may be needed at specific courses.
- Strategic actions include:

- Need exact figures from all clubs in Colchester to be able to support any requirements they may have.
- Continuing to diversify golf experiences (e.g., short formats, adventure golf, and family engagement)

## 12. Athletics

### 12.1 Demand Update

| Category | 2023 Members | 2025 Members |
|---|---|---|
| **Seniors Men's** | 17 | ? |
| **Senior Women's** | 32 | ? |
| **Juniors** | 5 | ? |
| **Total** | **374** | **400** |

- There are 7 England Athletics affiliated running clubs within Colchester.
- Participation in Colchester is supported mainly through Colchester Harriers AC and Colchester & Tendring AC, both based at the Garrison Athletics Stadium in the city.
- Colchester Harriers AC membership numbers have increased overall since 2023, however, it has been difficult to attain category numbers. The only club that responded to the 2023 strategy consultation was Team2gether (whose figures are in the table above).

### 12.2 Supply Update

- The supply of dedicated athletics facilities is sufficient to meet demand, although quality improvements may be required in the near future.
- Priority should be placed on supporting activity being accommodated by the various running clubs in Colchester and the events that are being held.
- There is one purpose-built athletics track in Colchester, provided at the Colchester Garrison Athletics Stadium, which remains the primary facility for club training and competitions. The venue provides a 400-metre track that is serviced by sports lighting and is available to the community.
- The track is standard quality with resurfacing required in the near future but is serviced by good quality ancillary facilities.
- The track surface at Colchester Station was resurfaced in 2023 and a new World Athletics certified Throws cage has been installed. The venue is fully TrackMark accredited until October 2027 and it is envisaged that the track surface will not require resurfacing again until 2032.
- Two of the seven clubs identified (as having a current focus on athletics and/or running) are looking for a purpose-built facility.
- None of the clubs consulted with have a waiting list in place and all clubs are open to gaining new members.
- Colchester and Tendring AC, Running Colchester and Parkside Road Runners all form part of the Run Together initiative.

- A Park Run event is held each week at Colchester Castle, Highwoods and Mersea Island.
- Annual events held in include the Colchester Half Marathon and the Santa Fun Run.

### 12.3 Significant Issues for Athletics

- Cost hire of the track is ideal but accessing track to hire it for extra days is difficult. The company who run the track state it isn't available for "public" use as it is a garrison track and for the army.
- The clubs have a quota of days and apparently exceed it - there is no transparency about how many days there are, and why the club has less than the other club who uses the track etc. It has been an issue for the past year since the previous manager died and a new one took over.
- Financially - not a barrier, but logistically, a nightmare. It prevents the club putting on extra training and comps for the athletes. Particularly worrying with the new age group changes limiting participation in leagues for the U12s and U10s.
- The current facility is adequate but lacks the investment needed to support elite-level or large regional events.

### 12.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Considerations should be made for the installation of mini, compact or active tracks as to increase the amount of athletics provision provided
- Colchester's track facility is essential but requires targeted investment to improve its accessibility, versatility and longevity.
- Recommendations include:

    - Ensure the track and supporting facilities at the Colchester Garrison Athletics Stadium are retained and remain in adequate condition.
    - Support clubs, running groups, events and England Athletics initiatives such as Park Run and pursue increased participation, where possible.
    - 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.

## 13. Bowls

### 13.1 Demand Update

| Club Category | 2023 Members | 2025 Members |
|---|---|---|
| **Senior Men's** | 369 | ? |
| **Senior Women's** | 169 | ? |
| **Mixed Juniors (U18)** | 3 | ? |
| **Total** | **541** | **?** |

- Largest club was West Mersea.
- No member data for 2025 has been provided.

### 13.2 Supply Update

- There are ten bowling greens in Colchester located across eight sites, of which, two sites are accommodating more than one green, located at West End Sports Ground Bowls and Old Heath Recreation Ground. All greens are available for community use.
- No major changes in pitch supply since 2023.

### 13.3 Significant Issues for Bowls

- Stereotypically seen as a sport for the older generation and Bowls England is still actively working to negate that by taking steps to work with younger players.
- Unclear on the bowls landscape in Colchester as no response to this update.

### 13.4 Summary and Conclusions for Bowls

- Ensuring community access to existing courts is a key priority to increase uptake in bowls.
- Unclear on whether there has been an increased need since 2023 to establish where the need for improvements is.
- Strategic actions include:

    - Implementing formal community use agreements where required.
    - Supporting existing clubs improve their facilities and ensuring the overplayed sites can accommodate for the current levels of demand.

## 14. Cycling

### 14.1 Demand Update

- Colchester continues to experience growth in recreational and commuter cycling.
- Participation in local cycling events and community initiatives has increased since 2023.

### 14.2 Supply Update

- The off-road cycling circuit at Northern Gateway Sports Park remains the principal site for competitive and training use. The site features a closed 1600m macadam circuit and BMX track, suitable for both junior and senior training.
- Public use of the facility is high, with regular bookings from local schools and clubs.
- Organised participation is primarily delivered through Colchester Cycle Campaign and the British Cycling coordinator at Northern Gateway Sports Park.

### 14.3 Significant Issues for Cycling

- Demand for organised cycling facilities remains strong, particularly for safe, off-road environments.
- Increased interest in cycling has led to pressure on available slots at the Northern Gateway Sports Park circuit.
- There is growing interest in cyclocross and mountain biking formats, but suitable terrain within the Colchester boundary is limited.

### 14.4 Summary and Conclusions

- Cycling participation is strong and existing facilities are well-used and maintained, though demand for access and format variety is growing.
- Recommendations include:

    - Explore opportunities to expand access at Northern Gateway Sports Park
    - Support club growth and participation through shared-use scheduling
    - Assess feasibility of additional cycling disciplines (e.g. cyclocross, MTB) on underutilised open spaces, parks or as part of the Sport Park expansion

## 15. Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs)

### 15.1 Demand Update

- MUGAs continue to be widely used by informal and recreational users, including young people and families. Given the informal use of these facilities, it is still difficult to ascertain quantity of demand.

### 15.2 Supply Update

- Across Colchester there are 4 MUGAs all of which are located to the central / east area of the city, across parks and housing estates, offering mixed-use play for basketball, football, and general fitness.
- MUGAs are free to access and mostly surfaced with macadam.
- Lighting remains a constraint, limiting year-round usage.

### 15.3 Significant Issues for MUGAs

- Some MUGAs are ageing and require resurfacing or improved fencing.
- There is interest in introducing smart lighting to extend usable hours, particularly in residential areas.
- Programming opportunities (e.g. supervised sessions or youth coaching) are underdeveloped for MUGAs and could be a way of capturing specific use.

### 15.4 Summary and Conclusions

- MUGAs play a critical role in promoting physical activity that is free and accessible in Colchester.
- Recommendations:

    - Audit and prioritise refurbishment of ageing MUGA stock
    - Explore lighting improvements for extended access
    - Promote structured and inclusive programming to maximise use

## 16. Strategic Priorities and Delivery Plan

### 16.1 Vision Statement

To provide high-quality, accessible, and sustainable outdoor sports facilities across Colchester that support inclusive participation, club development, and long-term health and wellbeing benefits.

### 16.2 Strategic Themes

1. **Protect**

    - Safeguard existing playing pitch and outdoor sport provision through planning policies and local engagement.
    - Prevent loss of key sites without mitigation or replacement.

2. **Enhance**

    - Improve the quality and functionality of existing facilities, prioritising grass pitch maintenance, ancillary amenities, and floodlighting.
    - Support investment in digital access systems and resurfacing of MUGAs.

3. **Provide**

    - Address current and projected shortfalls by supporting delivery of new facilities, including 3G AGPs, cricket nets and padel courts.
    - Plan for future growth linked to housing and population increases.

### 16.3 Priority Investment Areas (2025–2030)

| Theme | Action | Lead Partners |
|---|---|---|
| **Football** | Expand provision of 3G AGPs | Colchester CC, Essex FA, Football Foundation |
| **Cricket** | Facility upgrades to changing rooms, toilets and kitchens. | Colchester CC, Essex Cricket |
| **Rugby** | Secure tenure and repair upgrade drainage issues to pitches. | Colchester RFC, Eastern Rhinos RLU, Colchester CC |
| **Tennis/Padel** | Demand data for Padel growth | Colchester CC, LTA, Schools |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Hockey** | Upgrade pitch surface | England Hockey, Local Clubs, Colchester CC |
| **Athletics** | Upgrade track and field equipment, explore access issues | Colchester Harriers AC, Colchester & Tendring AC, England Athletics |
| **Cycling** | Cyclocross, MTB | British Cycling, Colchester Cycle Campaign, Colchester CC |
| **MUGAs** | Audit sites, invest in lighting and programming | Colchester CC, Youth Services |

### 16.4 Monitoring and Governance

- A cross-agency Sport Facilities Development Group in Colchester meet biannually to monitor delivery progress.
- Stakeholders will update action plans annually.
- The strategy will remain a material planning consideration, particularly for developer S106 contributions.

### 16.5 Next Steps

- Share updated strategy with clubs, schools, and community networks.
- Seek external funding aligned with national governing body investment programmes.
- Develop project briefs for priority facility improvements based on site-specific needs and opportunity.
- Use updates to help inform new Local Plan and overarching list of projects against site allocations and planned area of growth.