

Report for: Cabinet

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| Date of Meeting: | Tuesday 13 th January 2026 |
| Subject: | Tennis to Padel Court |
| Cabinet Member: | Cllr Josh Wright |
| Responsible Officer: | Andrew Jarrett – Deputy Chief Executive (S151) |
| Exempt: | Appendix B – Part II Part 2- Commercially sensitive |
| Wards Affected: | All |
| Enclosures: | Appendix A – Part 1 (images and description). Exempt Appendix B – Part II (Financials. References of prospective lease holder |

Reason for Report:

Proposal to convert existing tennis courts at Active Tiverton and Active Crediton into padel and pickleball facilities, working in partnership with a third-party operator under a lease. This includes a proposal to relocate the tennis courts to Amory Park, maintaining provision while modernising facilities.

Recommendation:

That Cabinet approves:

- 1. To convert all three tennis courts at Active Tiverton to Padel courts.**
- 2. To convert one tennis court at Active Crediton to one Padel court and one Pickleball court.**
- 3. To relocate the Tennis courts to Amory Park.**
- 4. To finalise any due diligence/obtaining of references deemed necessary before the legal agreement is finalised.**

5. That Delegated Authority be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) officer and Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to sign and approve the legal agreement.

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Active Mid Devon is a non-statutory service, operating centres in; Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton. The assets include Artificial Turf Pitches, Fitness Studios, Multipurpose Studios, Sports Halls, Squash Courts, Swimming Pools, Teaching Pools, Tennis Courts, Training Rooms and Saunas.
- 1.2 2025/26 has been successful to date, as was 2024/25. The leisure service has reduced its operating cost by £543K.
- 1.3 The service to date has circa 4,500 adult members and 2,200 junior members, in addition to walk-in pay and play customers.
- 1.4 In the financial year 2024/25, more than 600,000 visits were recorded primarily attending the fitness, swimming pool and outdoor pitches. The service also works with more than 60 schools, clubs and organisations that access the swimming pools and 'dry' areas such as sports halls, studios, racquet courts and artificial-turf pitches. The financial year 2025/26 targeted an annual income of circa £3.7m operating with an establishment of 60 full-time equivalent roles deployed across approximately 162 team members.
- 1.5 Mid Devon District Council (the Council) is committed to reducing the level of subsidy required to operate its leisure services while continuing to improve and expand the offer available to residents. To achieve this, we must explore innovative ways to diversify our sporting provision and introduce activities that appeal to a broader audience. By embracing alternative sports and developing new revenue streams, the Council can generate sustainable income, enhance community wellbeing, and ensure our facilities remain relevant and financially resilient for the future.

2.0 Padel

- 2.1 According to the *Global Padel Report 2025* by Playtomic and Price WaterHouse Cooper (PwC), padel is one of the fastest-growing sports worldwide, with over 35 million players and court numbers projected to reach 70,000 globally by 2026. In the UK, growth has accelerated significantly, with hundreds of new courts installed and strong demand from operators and investors. This surge reflects padel's broad appeal and social nature, making it a key opportunity for modernising facilities and attracting new users.
- 2.2 In June 2025 officers met with a third-party investor to explore options to convert all three Tennis courts at Active Tiverton to seven padel courts, with further plans to create a cover structure for all year-round use. One tennis

court at Active Crediton was reviewed with this proposal and would see a conversion to incorporate one padel court and one pickleball court. The proposal would be under a lease agreement.

- 2.3 Padel has been adopted by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and as such is governed by them. This is testament to the growing popularity of the sport.

3.0 Relocation of Tennis facilities

- 3.1 The Operations Manager and Centre Manager from Active Mid Devon met with the Tiverton Tennis Club Chair and Secretary for introductory discussions on the topic of relocation of Tennis to Amory Park and to establish how we might best accommodate their needs in the event we move forward with the proposal. This discussion was positive and there is an appetite to work together to ensure the best outcome for all. Provisional talks with a representative from Crediton Tennis Club was also positive, with real support for an extended racquet sport offer.
- 3.2 Amory Park has a hardcourt area currently underutilised and in need of work. It sits adjacent to the football fields and clubhouse, and both need investment. The investment is estimated at up to £300k for the entire area, including fencing, lighting and club house improvements. Whilst the relocation of three tennis courts alone does not amount to this, it could be considered a positive opportunity to revitalise the entire area as part of one project. The estimated costs of which are below and are based on prudent estimates and soft market research. Working alongside other stakeholders will determine a refined scope of work

| Table of estimated costs | |
|--|----------|
| Prep, pierce and chase existing macadam, overlay with new porous macada surface to achieve better levels of porosity | £108,000 |
| colour spray with acrylic standard colour options including line marking | £31,000 |
| Floodlight improvements | £40,000 |
| Fencing - secure & gates improvements | £30,000 |
| Pavillion changing room improvements and sepration | £40,000 |
| CCTV | £10,000 |
| Contingency | £40,000 |
| | £299,000 |

- 3.3 The key item to address was parking facilities at Amory Park for which further exploratory work should be undertaken.
- 3.4 There is approx. £150k in Ear Marked Reserves for Amory Park. This figure is not included in the table found in 3.1.

4.0 Proposal

- 4.1 To convert all three tennis courts at Active Tiverton to padel courts.
- 4.2 To convert one tennis court at Active Crediton to one padel court and one pickleball court.
- 4.3 To relocate the tennis courts to Amory Park.
- 4.4 To finalise any due diligence/obtaining of references deemed necessary before the legal agreement is finalised.
- 4.5 That Delegated Authority be granted to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) officer and Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to sign and approve the legal agreement.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The tennis courts are underutilised and generate little revenue. They are not well booked by existing members and club use brings in little revenue
- 5.2 Both Active Tiverton and Crediton's courts need resurfacing which alone represents a large capital outlay. Active Crediton's remaining three courts can be resurfaced at a lower cost and better quality as part of a maintenance cycle, improving the provision of Tennis at Crediton, with a much improved and unique racquet sport offering. Active Tiverton would avoid any resurfacing cost for the duration of the lease.
- 5.3 Padel stands out as a sociable and inclusive sport that brings people together across ages and skill levels. Its accessible format and emphasis on teamwork make it easy for newcomers to join and enjoy. With rapid global growth and increasing popularity, padel is more than just a game—it's a gateway to an active, healthy lifestyle, fostering community, fitness, and fun in equal measure.
- 5.4 A commercial lease agreement offers a guaranteed income for the Council, reduced resurfacing costs over the term of the lease and more protection from competition.
- 5.5 Amory Park is underused and in need of work to lift the area. It generates no income from the hard court. A LTA 'Club Spark' system could be adopted to enable bookings online with access granted by a code, supporting year-round revenue generation with the ability to open it up for free of charge for community use times.
- 5.6 There will be joint working with all parties to ensure a smooth transition to Amory Park, to mitigate any down time in Tennis play, and this has already been considered in early discussions with the Tennis Club at Tiverton.

- 5.7 This proposal offers a unique opportunity to grow the leisure offering in Mid Devon, delivering an innovative new and popular sport, securing a significant guaranteed income annually, raising the profile of Active Mid Devon and the Council and reducing the subsidy of the leisure services.
- 5.8 The investment in Amory Park represents an opportunity to do something meaningful with a piece of land designed for sport, but underused, while helping to generate revenue.

Financial Implications:

The full up-front costs of court conversion would be met by the lessee, with the annual lease being agreed as part of the proposal that would see a significant revenue amount being returned to the council each year. This will continue to maximise the cost-effectiveness of the leisure service, alongside opening up a popular new activity for local communities.

The associated Amory Park projected spend would be £300k. Whilst the relocated Tennis provision alone only accounts for approximately £80k, the opportunity should be seized to regenerate the entire area, introducing other revenue streams and activities.

We would likely see an increase in footfall at both sites, secondary sales and membership revenue of being home to the fastest growing sport in Europe. This additional revenue from secondary sales and membership has not been factored into the return on investment (ROI) table (found Appendix A) in order to give a prudent ROI based on known rental income and conservative Tennis income.

Annually the Council generates circa £12k in revenue from the tennis courts at Active Tiverton and Active Crediton combined. Based on booking numbers from April 2025 to December 2025, only 1.85% of the total membership base had played Tennis at Active Tiverton.

Amory Park currently generates no revenue from its hard standing, it is open for access but has no line markings or equipment and can be subject to abuse. The relocation of tennis courts there, if income remained, would contribute circa £9k pa of revenue with room for growth. Other areas if let out on a similar operating model could generate an additional circa £10-£15k per year.

Legal Implications:

Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 requires us to advertise the proposed disposal of public open space and to consider any objections. The revised proposal anticipates that the Executive will authorise the Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience to advertise the disposal and, if no objections are received, to complete the lease. The Council must also be satisfied that the rent and revenue

share represent the best consideration reasonably obtainable. A formal valuation and social-value assessment will be required.

A planning application will be required because padel courts have 6 m-high end walls. Any canopy structure in the future will also require planning consent. The Council retains responsibility as planning authority for determining the application and must act impartially. If the project proceeds, conditions may be imposed concerning lighting, noise, access and community use. The Council should ensure that design complies with Building Regulations, and Sport England guidance.

Repair and maintenance – Consideration will be given to including a full repairing clause into the lease so that the investor / tenant is responsible for repair and maintenance.

The proposal indicates that the investor / tenant seeks a 20-year lease and consideration will also be given to the paying of utilities, obtaining of relevant public liability insurance and meeting of the lifecycle costs.

Equality Act 2010 – The project must ensure reasonable adjustments for disabled users. The proposal promises step-free access and wheelchair padel; these commitments should be binding.

Data protection –The tenant will use the Playtomic booking platform. We will need a data-processing agreement and assurances that Playtomic complies with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data collected from users must not be used for marketing without consent.

Risk Assessment:

The risk is considered low because the conversion costs and operational responsibilities will be borne by the third-party operator under a full repairing and insuring lease. This means the Council is not exposed to financial risk if participation levels do not meet expectations, as rental income is guaranteed regardless of usage. The primary risks relate to potential disruption for existing tennis users and reliance on a third-party operator, which will be mitigated through robust lease terms and relocation of tennis provision to Amory Park. Conversely, the risk of not adopting the proposal is significant: the Council would continue to incur high maintenance and resurfacing costs for underutilised courts, while missing the opportunity to introduce a fast-growing sport, increase participation, and secure a substantial uplift in income.

Impact on Climate Change:

Minor or moderate impact in terms of materials.

No loss of habitat. (No impact.)

Negligible change to rainwater drainage regime. (No impact.)

Currently the courts are hard-standing surfaces with negligible habitat value. There will be conversion / construction to create padel courts on the same areas, comprising sand-dressed artificial turf. We will take steps to make sure the conversion process avoids / minimises waste e.g. removal and disposal of material.

New signage and plastic / Perspex frames will be needed at the courts. This is minor given the scale of leisure service maintenance such as usage and frequency of replacements of signage.

Opportunity to reduce the annual footprint of energy and emissions linked to leisure services. Minor benefit.

No change to the lighting is required at this stage, although in year 2 a planning application for a cover would be sought and at that stage a change of floodlights to install a lower, more efficient LED lighting array would be pursued.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

The introduction of padel courts at Active Tiverton and Active Crediton is expected to have a positive equality impact, supporting Active Mid Devon's commitment to inclusivity and community wellbeing.

Relationship to Corporate Plan:

Creating padel courts in Mid Devon could align strongly with several themes and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2024–2028, particularly around innovation, economic growth, community wellbeing, and sustainable development.

Economy & Assets

Objective: Grow the district economy and increase returns from our assets.

Fit: Padel courts represent a new and growing sport in the UK, offering potential for increased participation, tourism, and income generation. By investing in this innovative facility, the Council could attract new users to leisure centres, increase memberships, and generate revenue through bookings, events, and coaching.

Planning, Environment & Sustainability

Objective: Be a leader and pioneer of best practice so innovation and thinking is at the heart of the services we deliver. Fit: Introducing padel courts demonstrates forward-thinking and responsiveness to emerging trends in leisure.

Community, People & Equalities

Objective: Support health, wellbeing, and safety of residents.

Fit: Padel is inclusive and accessible, appealing to a wide demographic including families, older adults, and those new to sport. It fosters social interaction and physical activity, contributing to community wellbeing.

Strategic Support from Leisure and Sports Planning

The Mid Devon Playing Pitch Strategy (2022) provides a framework for assessing and developing sports facilities. While it currently focuses on traditional sports, it encourages innovation and collaboration with national governing bodies and Sport England.

Financial and Operational Fit

Given the Council's projected budget shortfalls, projects that generate income, attract external funding and increase social value are particularly attractive.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 05.01.2026

Statutory Officer: Maria De Leiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 05.01.2026

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 05.01.2026

Performance and risk: Stephen Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 05.01.2026

Cabinet member notified: (yes)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Andy Mackie (Operations Manager)

Email: amackie@middevon.gov.uk

Background papers: Business case and summary paper