

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Present:-

Councillors Jobson, Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Begley, Bennett, Bialyk, Cookson, Darling, Foale, Fullam, Haigh, Harding, Holland, Hussain, Ketchin, Knott, Miller-Boam, Mitchell, K, Mitchell, M, Moore, Palmer, Parkhouse, Payne, Pole, Read, Rees, Rolstone, Snow, Vizard, Wardle, Wetenhall, Williams, M, Williams, R, Wood and Wright

Also Present

Head of Service - Finance, Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place and Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer

16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

17 **STRATA - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - 28 JANUARY 2026**

The Lord Mayor advised that these matters were resolved but had to be approved as Exeter City Council formed part of the Strata Executive Committee.

The Leader moved, and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations. In moving the recommendations, the Leader thanked the team at Strata for their work and felt that the business case was clear and a large amount of work had gone into its completion.

18 **KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELDS**

The Leader moved, and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations.

The Strategic Director for Place presented the report, making the following points:

- this was a community project and was rooted in the community;
- it was in line with Exeter's Corporate Plan, particularly People and Health;
- approval would unlock significant external funding;
- this project would support grassroots football;
- the current facility was aging and many of the turf pitches were unusable in poor weather due to drainage;
- the Council was working closely with Exeter City Community Trust;
- planning permission for improvements had been granted in 2025;
- significant improvements would be made in the pitches, accessibility, environment, and the experience of people using the facility;
- there was also a commitment to biodiversity improvements;
- £464,948.02 would be from s106;
- this project had been identified as meeting the requirements to use s106 funding;
- extensive community engagement with residents, clubs, school leagues and community groups had been carried out by ECCT;
- feedback on this project had been overwhelmingly supportive;

- one of the key hopes for this project was development of youth football, and football for women and girls;
- close attention had been paid to the building design, and it would be up to BREEAM Excellent Standard;
- the 3g pitch is a priority, and meetings would be had with Sport England and the Football Foundation; and
- replanting of an orchard, and hedgerows and trees would take place.

In response to questions from Members, the Strategic Director for Place provided the following answers:

- all the funding identified was from completed developments and had been received already;
- there were currently no set performance objectives, but the Council were working with ECCT as part of the project;
- using existing parts of the building was more cost effective than demolishing and starting again;
- the infill of the artificial playing surface would be dealt with through the planning process; and
- the disposal of the artificial playing surface at the end of its life span would be dealt with through the planning process.

During debate, Councillor Moore, as Leader of the Green Group made the following comments:

- she was pleased to see this but wanted her concern about the material being used for the artificial pitch to be recorded;
- the materials being used wouldn't be taken out of use until 2031; and
- this project was important for the community and was a good example of the community working with the Council.

Councillor Holland, as Leader of the Conservative Group, made the following comments:

- he supported this with no reservation;
- the Exeter City Community Trust were a fantastic partnership;
- he welcomed the biodiversity that this project would bring; and
- he hoped that thought would be put into the placement of the proposed orchard.

During debate, Members made the following comments:

- this development could not come soon enough;
- there was a shortage of football pitches in the city, and the use of 3g pitches would extend playability;
- the 3g pitch would extend the capacity;
- using s106 funding was fantastic, and provided an opportunity to use funding that might be lost;
- this project was a testament to hard work over a number of years;
- concerns had been raised by players about the quality of the existing pitches;
- this was a good example of local authority working in partnership with community groups;
- greater capacity for matches should be welcomed;
- developments to playing surfaces should be minded, and the playing surface should be kept under review;
- the increase in football offered to women and girls was particularly positive;

- the women's Euros last summer inspired more people to start putting together girls football teams;
- Exeter City Community Trust was a great asset to the city;
- artificial surfaces were almost never rendered unusable due to weather;
- it was important that we educate young people on staying safe in nature;
- lots of positive comments had been received from residents on social media; and
- the report made it clear that this was positive, there had been good partnership work, and it was able to attract funding from elsewhere.

In summing up, the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, made the following points:

- the collaboration that had happened in bringing this forward needed to be remembered;
- this highlighted that the Council were able to work in a collaborative manner with other organisations;
- it was important that rubber crumb was remembered, but this was a planning issue;
- participation from all age groups was important; and
- every councillor should be proud of what was happening here.

Following a unanimous vote, the recommendations were CARRIED.

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WONFORD COMMUNITY WELLBEING HUB

Councillors Asvachin and Begley declared an interest in this item they are both trustees of the Wonford Community Hub. Both Councillors left the room and did not return for the remainder of the meeting.

The Leader moved, and Councillor Wright seconded the recommendations.

The Strategic Director for Place presented the report, making the following points:

- the project had been paused due to insufficient funding previously;
- Sport England had had a major contribution in the design process;
- a variety of options have been looked at, and all costed between four and seven million pounds;
- only two of the proposed options were considered supportable by Sport England;
- the proposed design was not too different from previously granted planning permission;
- pictures created with CGI showed the outlook through the development onto Ludwell Valley Park;
- no new planning permission was required, but amendments to the existing planning permission would be needed;
- the business case could not be completed without the design being confirmed;
- to receive the funding agreement, Exeter City Council needed to match funding provided and deliver the project by Summer 2028;
- this was a critical project, and is eligible for CIL funding;
- after four years, the income generation would break even, which would be helped by not using capital borrowing;
- the process could not be started until funding was secured,;
- they would be looking for opportunities to limit carbon emissions;
- the gateway to Ludwell Valley Park was a key part of the design; and
- there was potential for broader community use, which could help to improve health outcomes.

In response to questions from Members, the Strategic Director for Place provided the following responses:

- there would be minor amendments to the planning permission which would be delegated to officers;
- the recommendation for this report had not changed following the funding announcement last week;
- he would be meeting with the Place Partnership (Sport England) Manager to finalise decisions;
- transport for the site would be dealt with through the planning process;
- the application to amend the planning permission had yet to be submitted but there had been lots of engagement with the planning team;
- s106 funding was included in the overall funding of the scheme;
- in order to complete the project, part of the building needed to be demolished so the lease needed to be ended;
- a business plan would include the leisure services, and community element;
- conversations would be had with the community to establish how this would work for them;
- the tender process and costs would be dealt with as part of the next stage of the project;
- 5% contingency was the industry norm and the risk would be managed through the design process;
- a risk remained in the procurement process but ultimately costs could be revised if necessary;
- Devon County Council would be involved in the conversation about the lease;
- Exeter City Council offered a subsidised leisure service to try and ensure that leisure was accessible; and
- there were not a large number of external sources for funding, but there was still an opportunity for grant sources, however, this funding had been identified with no additional cost or borrowing.

The meeting was adjourned at 19:16 and resumed at 19:24.

Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Read, moved an additional recommendation:

- To ensure future local community involvement in the use of the building, a partnership agreement is signed with the community organisation stakeholders of the new centre, and this is reported to Council.

The Lord Mayor advised Councillor Moore that this was an inappropriate amendment in accordance with Standing Order 10(6).

During debate, Councillor Moore made the following points:

- she clarified that she had not said there was a lack of community engagement;
- she wanted to commitment from the Leader on the levels of community involvement and the partnership between the Council and the community;
- the community needed a real say in how the project would work in the future; and
- she would like real commitment about how this community involvement was going to be managed in a transparent way.

During debate Members made the following comments:

- the community were fully behind the project and Members could be assured that there would be community support;
- there were concerns about the constraint of the application and that the Council may end up contributing more than £6 million;
- there was no guarantee that it would be possible to find someone that could take on the work and also deliver it by summer 2028;
- residents in Wonford, and wider Exeter, deserved the type of facility that was being discussed;
- this project had evolved over a number of years, and the community had been engaged throughout;
- a soft entry into a more active lifestyle through community and shared spaces could be provided with this project;
- funding was being used in the right way and this money was exactly for this purpose;
- Sports England liked this project and wanted it to happen;
- this was a high risk project and it was important to get it right, even if that meant losing the funding from Sports England;
- it was the Council's statutory duty to ensure public money was being well used;
- a change in trustees could be a risk to the project;
- this project was an example of great partnership working;
- officers had worked extremely hard on this project and the work with Sports England had required a large amount of work;
- this project spoke to key ambitions of the community support in the city, and to health and wellbeing through sport and leisure;
- the community of Wonford had been waiting for this for a very long time and it had been years in the making;
- it was important to find local contractors;
- it was heart-warming to hear about the aim for future commitment and community involvement;
- this needed to deliver real community involvement and benefit;
- the only alternative to this project was for the building to remain as was and need to be closed eventually; and
- Wonford Community and Leisure Centre was built in the 1980s and something needed to be done.

In summing up, the Leader, Councillor Bialyk, made the following points:

- Wonford Community and Leisure Centre had been built in the 80s to address a need in that area;
- residents were looking forward to this happening;
- this was a joint venture, and the community would still be running their community services;
- 10.25 of the report made it clear how this would be dealt with; and
- approving this would show that it was worth putting money into Exeter because it would go where it was needed.

Following a vote the recommendations were CARRIED.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.43 pm)

Chair