

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET ON 23 JUNE 2026 FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL HELD ON 21 JULY 2026

EC89: Cabinet Report – West Norfolk Racket and Community Sports Hub

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture introduced report and explained that the proposal was for the development of a West Norfolk Racket and Community Hub at Lynnsport, comprising three covered padel courts, weatherproofed tennis courts and a multi-use games area (MUGA) to increase capacity, widen community access and create new opportunities for active wellbeing across the Borough.

It was noted that the hub should not be viewed solely as a sports facility, but as a long-term investment in healthier residents, stronger communities and improved life opportunities across West Norfolk. Located to serve some of the Borough's most deprived communities, the development would help to remove barriers to activities and facilities that had traditionally been unavailable or inaccessible to many residents.

It was explained that the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) had prioritised the scheme nationally as a pilot for a new, broader funding model supporting multi-activity community provision, placing West Norfolk at the forefront of the approach.

The total cost of the project was circa £2,200,000 including contingency. The scheme addressed high demand, limited covered provision and indoor facilities operating at over 93% capacity.

It was explained that funding would be met through the most appropriate mix of the LTA low-interest loan option and PWLB borrowing to be determined by the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

Overall, the proposal secured approximately 45% external funding (£1,000,000) and represented an opportunity to secure external investment, make better use of existing council assets, strengthen the long-term sustainability of the leisure portfolio, increase opportunities for residents to be physically active and support the Council's wider ambitions around prevention, health inequalities, community wellbeing and economic growth.

The Chair thanked the Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Moore referred to an email sent to the Panel which questioned the evidence supporting claims that the hub would benefit underrepresented groups and reduce health inequalities.

The Interim Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture asked Councillor Moore to send her the email, which she would respond to and referenced the Polinski report, strategic leisure analysis, and community outreach data, confirming that

programming would ensure accessibility and targeted provision for deprived areas, with ongoing monitoring of key performance indicators.

Councillor Ring, Portfolio Holder added that evidence was always important. He added that this would not just be padel courts as the LTA had accepted that the courts could be used for other things.

Councillor Long asked for assurances that the proposal would deliver a return for taxpayers.

In response, it was explained that the proposal included a positive business case with a projected payback period of eight years and eight months, supported by a 45% funding contribution from the LTA and DCMS. Conservative financial assumptions were used, with a 13% contingency built in to mitigate risks. The project was expected to be self-funding and not impact wider sports provision budgets.

The Interim Assistant Director advised that the facility would include three covered tennis courts, three paddle courts, and a multi-use games area, all under a single canopy. The courts would be bookable, with a blend of chargeable and free sessions targeting specific groups. Technical concerns about drainage, structural integrity, and weatherproofing were addressed, with assurances that proven designs and upgraded drainage systems were in place.

Councillor Bullen added that this was an impressive scheme but hoped that it would not be at the expense of other facilities in the Borough such as Downham Market.

The Interim Assistant Director advised that there were wider plans being considered, but the Racket and Community Sports Hub under consideration was a self-funded model.

Councillor Devulapalli asked for the Panel to receive a copy of the response to Councillor Moore from the Interim Director.

It was explained that if approved the LTA funding was expected in August, with construction estimated to take six to nine months following planning approval.

RESOLVED: That the Environment and Community Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet and full Council, as set out below:

Cabinet resolves:

1. That the West Norfolk Racket and Community Sports Hub at Lynnsport be approved at a cost of £2.2m.
2. That subject to approval for the funding by full Council, the project be progressed from Tier 3 to Tier 1 of the Capital Programme for delivery and progress to be reported and monitored by the Member Major Project Board.

Recommendation to full Council:

1. That an increase to the Council's contribution from £866,000 to £1,200,000 to fund the scheme be approved, an increase of £334,000.
2. That delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, to determine the most appropriate financing mix for the Council's £1,200,000 funding of the project.