Future development of Farnham Park Playing Fields and South Buckinghamshire Golf Course

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How we're working with Wycombe Wanderers FC

We're working with Wycombe Wanderers to develop Farnham Park Playing Fields and the South Buckinghamshire Golf Course.

We want the area to become a flagship sporting hub with modern features and inclusive facilities. This will give more residents the opportunity to be able to play sport and be more active.

Wycombe Wanderers are the new leaseholders. They've been asking for feedback from clubs and organisations who already use the site, and other local stakeholders.

They'll operate the site from July 2026.

Latest updates

View our most recent updates:

- February 2026 update on Wycombe Wanderers website
- September 2025 update on Wycombe Wanderers website
- August 2025 press release

View more about our vision

You can view more about our vision and sign up for updates on the Wycombe Wanderers website.

Give your feedback

Wycombe Wanderers are now inviting the local community to take part in their public engagement activity, to inform the longer-term proposals for the site. Feedback will help shape the final proposals before Wycombe Wanderers submit a planning application.

Find out more about how you can take part on the Wycombe Wanderers website.

In-depth information about the decision making

Our role and legal duties as the trustee

The Council is the sole corporate trustee for the Farnham Park Sports Field Charitable Trust which covers most of the land at Farnham Park Playing Fields and the South Buckinghamshire Golf Course. The Eton Rural District Council Act sets out the charitable purposes for which the land is to be used, which is for improving local people’s health and physical wellbeing through the provision of facilities for physical training, sports and recreation.

As trustee, the Council has been considering the future operating arrangements for the Playing Fields and South Buckinghamshire Golf Course for some time. The site has been running at a deficit, and future investment into the sports and recreation facilities is needed to ensure it remains an attractive place to play sport and be active for generations to come.

The Council as trustee decided to pursue a long-term leasing arrangement which would continue the use of the land for physical training and sport (in line with the charitable purposes), provide financial sustainability and opportunities for investment into the facilities. This route was selected following a thorough review of different options, including adjustments to the existing in-house operating arrangements, and outsourcing under a leisure operator contract.

The Council has followed the legal processes needed for leasing charity land, including seeking advice from a designated adviser acting on behalf of the Trust and issuing public notices in late 2024 seeking feedback on the proposed leasing arrangement.

In early 2025, the lease opportunity was openly marketed to attract proposals from interested parties. Following an evaluation process, Wycombe Wanderers FC was chosen as the preferred leaseholder in August 2025.

The new leasing arrangement with Wycombe Wanderers will bring significant investment to modernise and enhance the facilities at both the Playing Fields and the golf course. Wycombe Wanderers will take on the day-to-day maintenance and operational management of the site and invest in improvements, with usage continuing in line with the Eton Rural District Council Act. The Council will remain as trustee for the site.

Our shared vision for the site is that it becomes a modern, multi-sports hub with inclusive facilities that will significantly increase opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds across the community to play sport and be active, ensuring the charitable purposes are not only preserved, but strengthened.

Buckinghamshire Council's role as sole Corporate Trustee

Many local authorities hold assets in trust. This means that the local authority is the sole corporate trustee of the charity. In this case, Buckinghamshire Council is trustee for the Farnham Park Sports Fields Trust and the land at Farnham Park Playing Fields and South Buckinghamshire Golf Course. Where a Council is corporate trustee, it is the local authority itself who is trustee, rather than individual councillors.

There is separation of the Council's role as trustee of the Trust from its other local authority roles for governance and decision making. Any decision made on behalf of the Trust by the Council as trustee is made with the Trust's charitable purposes and its best interests in mind, not that of the local authority.

The elected members of Buckinghamshire Council (acting as corporate trustee in the interests of the charity) make the key strategic decisions relating to the Trust. The operational oversight of the Trust is undertaken by Council officers in line with approved guidelines.

How the charity funds are managed

The Council ensures the Trust's finances are separate, and the Trust has a separate bank account from the Council's local authority accounts. Trust income is used for charitable purposes.

An annual report and review of accounts is produced for the Trust (Charity No. 308164). The latest reports for the year ended 31 March 2025 and the previous few years, can be viewed on the Charity Commission website: FARNHAM PARK SPORTS FIELDS - 308164.

Certain cost-recoverable items are due from the Trust to the Council, for example governance costs including the cost of preparing statutory accounts; these are transparently included in the accounts.

The Council does not have a statutory duty to pay the Trust costs

Charities are expected to be self-funding. The Council's obligation is as trustee for the land. Trustee duties do not extend to applying local authority, for example taxpayer funds to a charity.

Why things have to change

Change is needed because the current operating model is not sustainable:

- the facilities need significant investment
- operating costs have risen
- keeping things as they are would mean an ongoing decline in the facilities, rather than a secure and thriving future

The Trust is not in a financial position to make such investment and improvements itself.

We are not selling the land

The Council as trustee is entering into a long-term lease arrangement under which the charity land will continue to be used to provide facilities for physical training, sport and recreation in line with the charitable purposes, and which will reduce the maintenance costs and support the financial sustainability of the charitable trust.

Leasing is permitted under charity law provided the charity's purposes continue to be fulfilled and the required processes for charity leases have been followed, which is the case.

Why leasing is considered in the Trust's best interests

The new lease arrangement will secure the long-term future of the whole site as a community sporting asset, in a way that is financially sustainable and aligned with its charitable purpose. Under the lease, Wycombe Wanderers will be responsible for the operating costs for the site and will invest in improving the facilities, which will increase opportunities for people across the community to play sport and be active.

Why Wycombe Wanderers were selected as leaseholder

Wycombe Wanderers were selected as leaseholder because of their clear commitment to the entire site – one that brings investment, professional management and long-term sustainability to a place that is an important community asset. They have a strong track record of grass roots and community outreach and a key focus of their proposal was on increasing access to sport and expanding the range of activities on offer for the community, making this a modern and inclusive sports hub. The Club has extensive experience in facility management and has also brought in a golf expert with 40 years' experience in owning and operating golf courses. As well as a vision for sporting excellence, they demonstrated a real understanding of this site, its ecology, wildlife and habitats and a commitment to preserving these. They also provided a robust and attractive financial package which will provide significant investment into enhancing the facilities across both the playing fields and the golf course, which the Trust is not in a position to provide, but which is needed to ensure the site remains viable into the future.

The other proposals we considered

We received 10 initial proposals following open marketing of the leasing opportunity. The chosen proposal was considered most favourable based on deliverability, alignment with the Eton Rural District Council Act, and financial strength. The proposals contain confidential commercial information, but the below summary details are provided for transparency:

- Excluding the chosen party, these included other leisure operators (including within the fields of golf and football), commercial operators and private individuals.

- The proposals included mixed sports and leisure development across the playing fields and golf course sites, reductions of the golf course to accommodate new facilities, retention of the 18 hole golf course and mixed sports hubs.
- Concerns about the proposals related to the deliverability of proposals, the playing fields operations, overreliance on alternative enterprise, concerns about alignment to the Eton Rural District Council Act, limited shown knowledge or background in provision, tenant's covenant strength and capital expenditure proposals. In addition, some of the proposals were simply less favourable than the chosen party.

How the leasing process was authorised

Trustees have a general power of disposal (which includes leasing the land) under charities legislation provided there is no restriction on such disposal. The Eton Rural District Council Act 1971 does not restrict a leasehold disposal and gives the Council as trustee a choice on how to manage and maintain the Charity's land. Therefore, the Council as trustee has the general power of disposal. This must nevertheless be exercised to ensure that the charitable objects are still fulfilled and any appropriate processes are complied with.

The lease will require the charitable objects of physical training, sport and recreation, as set out in the 1971 Act, to be continued and provided on the land; and the correct process has been followed by the Council as trustee, in line with sections 117 through to section 121 of the Charities Act 2011, as set out in the published decision reports. This has included:

- issuing a public notice that was published in local newspapers and online (a letter was also sent to the Charities Commission to make them aware of the section 121 notice and the deadline to make any objections); no objections were received
- openly marketing the lease opportunity
- obtaining a designated advisor's report under section 119(1) of the Charities Act 2011, consideration of which formed part of the decision-making in August 2025.

The decision made on behalf of the Trust by the Council as trustee to progress the lease was taken with the Trust's charitable purposes and its best interests in mind, not that of the local authority. This was clearly signalled to decision makers in the decision reports, with provision of information on the legal requirements of local authorities acting as trustees.

What approvals and authority Wycombe Wanderers are currently working under

In line with the decision that was taken by the Council as trustee in August 2025 to progress the completion of the lease, work is progressing to manage the transition to the new arrangements.

How roles and responsibilities will work in future

As the new head leaseholder, Wycombe Wanderers will be responsible for the overall day-to-day maintenance and management of the land and its operations. There are other existing tenants who operate their own facilities and activities on site - examples include baseball, softball and rugby.

The Council remains the freeholder of the land and the sole corporate trustee of the Trust, and will continue to fulfil and exercise its duties as trustee.

How people can become involved or raise concerns

Most queries and feedback on the day-to-day operations of the facilities will continue to be handled by the on-site team; the existing on-site staff will be transferring to Wycombe Wanderers' employment as part of the new arrangements.

People can of course always continue to share feedback, raise concerns, or make complaints direct to the Council in its role as trustee.

More generally, the Council as trustee and Wycombe Wanderers have been engaging with key site users, tenants and stakeholders from the early stages of this process, and more information will be available soon on the wider public engagement on the longer-term plans for the site, which is planned to take place in advance of the submission of Wycombe Wanderers' planning application.

What safeguards are in place for the long term

The lease arrangements do not alter the Council's role as trustee, and the Council will continue to fulfil and exercise its duties as trustee to ensure that the land is used for the charitable purposes. The lease will require the tenant to adhere to the Act in respect of the Trust lands, which the Council as trustee can enforce.

Changes to the golf course operations

It is planned to move to a 9-hole course, and to run the course on a pay-as-you-play basis for all golfers, with affordable pricing to attract the widest possible usage.

The aim is to revitalise the course and broaden participation, making it more flexible, inclusive and attractive to families, young people, casual golfers and experienced players alike. Over recent years, the course has seen declining usage and has become financially unviable to operate in its current form. We want to bring financial stability and ensure that golf remains an active and sustainable part of this site for generations to come.

The move to nine holes is a first step towards widening participation in golf, making phased improvements to the facilities, and putting the course on a more affordable and sustainable footing for the future. In the longer-term, Wycombe Wanderers plan to continue to make improvements to the course and facilities to revitalise the entire golf offer and help golfers hone their skills before taking to the course. Whilst this is still to be decided and will be subject to planning permissions, this could include reconfiguring the holes and layout of the course, introducing a golf academy, providing pitch and putt areas, adding a driving range, refurbishing the clubhouse, and introducing new technologies for example golf simulators. The aim is to keep golf thriving here, not only for the present users, but for the next generation of golfers.

What the rationale is for the changes

A central aim of the proposed changes is to make golf more accessible, more flexible and better suited to how people want to play today. Moving to a shorter course and a full pay-and-play model will support more people to play the course, more often. Shorter rounds lower barriers for juniors, women, older adults, shift workers and families, for whom the time commitment and structure of an 18-hole round can be prohibitive.

This model will also support improvements in the reliability and consistency of the course. By concentrating maintenance and investment on a smaller footprint, we can address drainage issues, reduce winter closures, and provide a more reliable year-round course.

The existing operations have generated a significant loss for several years. Moving to a new layout will allow Wycombe Wanderers to start repositioning and improving the golf offer straight away to attract increased usage and participation, bring the golf offer onto a more sustainable footing, and begin investing in improvements to the course and facilities rather than continuing to absorb losses for another year or more.

Who will manage the golf course

The current on-site staff team will transfer across to Wycombe Wanderers' employment as part of the new arrangements, and Wycombe Wanderers have brought on a professional consultant team to manage the golf course.

This is led by Phil Stevens, an ex-professional golfer with approximately 40

years' experience in owning and operating golf clubs and facilities. His experience includes:

- Seaford Golf Club
- Hamptworth Golf Club
- Cowdray Golf and Polo
- Leatherhead Golf Club
- Manchester and Northwick Park Golf Centre
- Lingfield Marriott
- Chiddingfold Golf

What the proposed football training academy is and how will it sit alongside the golf course

More information on the proposed new football training facilities which form part of the wider masterplan for the future of golf course and playing fields will be available soon; this will be shared as part of the upcoming public engagement, to enable the public and stakeholders to review the proposals, ask questions and provide feedback, in advance of Wycombe Wanderers submitting their planning application.

What will happen to the golf course if planning permission for the football training academy is not granted

The site would continue to operate as a nine/twelve-hole golf facility alongside other wider sport and recreation uses. The move to nine holes reflects wider changes in how people use golf facilities, with increasing demand for flexibility, pay-as-you-play access, and shorter formats that fit around busy lives. The changes are about responding to that shift and ensuring the course remains viable and accessible to a wide range of local players for the future.

Longer-term plans

The mix of sports and recreation

The aim is to develop a balanced mix of sports and activities that serves a broad range of community needs. This includes making sure facilities are accessible, inclusive, and promote participation for people of different ages and abilities.

For more information on the vision for the site, view:
Our Vision for a New Community Sports Hub at Farnham Park / South Bucks - Wycombe Wanderers

Public consultation on future developments

View more information about Wycombe Wanderers' public engagement activity on the wider long-term proposals for the site.

The plans for future developments of facilities on site will also go through the full statutory planning process, which includes public consultation.

Related links and documents

You can read more information about the subjects we've mentioned on this page:

- Eton Rural District Council Act 1971
- Charity Commission (for copies of previous charity annual reports and accounts)
- Copy of Public Notice issued 2024
- Decision - Farnham Park Trust - Modern Council
- Summary Designated Advisors Report (PDF, 3.62 MB)

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