

Statement of Community Involvement

Proposed Padel Courts at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, Lower Earley, Wokingham

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1. Introduction and purpose

This statement accompanies the planning application for 4 padel courts at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre in Lower Earley. It explains how we've engaged existing users of the centre during the development of the proposals and how their feedback has shaped the final scheme.

Places Leisure takes consultation seriously. Facilities work better and last longer, when they're built with the people who'll actually use them, not just for them. This statement sets out how that happened here and meets Wokingham Borough Council's requirements for community involvement alongside the expectations of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. The proposal

The proposal is for 4 uncovered padel courts at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre. The courts will operate in line with the Leisure Centre's existing opening hours, so there's no extension to activity on site beyond what's already established.

Bookings will be made through the Playtomic app, which also controls the court lighting, so lights are only on when a court is actually in use rather than running to a fixed schedule. Access is managed through a remote gate system, with a QR code generated for each individual booking, so entry is tied directly to a confirmed session rather than left open.

3. Why padel and why here

Padel is growing faster than any other racket sport in Britain right now. LTA figures show participation going from 129,000 players at the end of 2023 to over 400,000 the following year, then to 860,000 by the end of 2025, more than doubling year on year. Over 10 million adults say they'd like to try it. Court numbers haven't kept pace, sitting at around 1,600 nationally against that level of interest. That gap is exactly why local authorities and leisure operators are increasingly building courts into existing public leisure centres, rather than leaving the sport to private members clubs alone.

It also lines up well with what Wokingham Borough Council has already said it wants from its leisure estate. The Council's Leisure Strategy commits to 'flexible new and established facilities that meet growing and changing demand over time' and to 'increasing footfall and levels of use' across the Borough. It also talks about building 'a thriving and diverse network of sports clubs catering for all levels of ability,' while making sure 'high quality facilities remain affordable, accessible and sustainable into the future whilst protecting provision for the more vulnerable.'

Padel fits that brief well. It's easier to pick up than tennis, works for a wide range of ages and abilities and tends to draw in people who wouldn't otherwise engage with racket sports at all, which is squarely the participation gap the Council is trying to close. Adding courts to an existing Places Leisure site also means no new land take, just better use of what's already there, which sits well with the Strategy's focus on getting more out of current facilities rather than building from scratch.

4. How we consulted

On site notices and signage at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre from inviting comments via email/QR code/feedback form.

Direct communication with existing members and users.

5. Who we heard from

Existing members and users of Loddon Valley Leisure Centre
Wokingham social pickleball group, who have also asked about padel provision at the site.

6. What people said and how we've responded

What came up	What we've done about it
Noise from play	Courts limited to existing Leisure Centre opening hours, so no new activity outside current hours.
Parking and traffic	Existing capacity assessment, no net increase in peak demand.
Lighting	Lighting is linked directly to Playtomic bookings, so courts are only lit when in active use rather than on a fixed timer.
Loss of existing use of the space	Courts sited on disused hard standing, no loss of other provision.
Demand and local need	A survey of 900 respondents at the centre identified Centre users who specifically requested padel. Wokingham's social pickleball groups have also asked for padel, and members are aware of a new padel facility due to open locally later this year, prompting questions about why one hadn't been provided at Loddon already. Customer comments requesting padel are also received regularly. Wokingham Borough Council has been supportive of the proposal throughout and is part funding the project.
Accessibility	Step free access, provision for wheelchair users

7. What changed because of consultation (examples)

- Court orientation adjusted to reduce noise impact
- Extra landscaping or screening added along boundary
- Lighting scheme revised to ensure only operational when courts are in use

8. What happens next

Consultation doesn't stop once planning is submitted. We'll keep a named site contact available for queries once the courts are in and will be creating a timetable of community programming to make sure existing users get first chance to try the new facility.

9. In summary

Feedback from existing centre users has been supportive, and the scheme has been amended to reflect what they told us. It also happens to do exactly what Wokingham Borough Council has said it wants from its leisure facilities, bringing one of the fastest growing sports in the country into an established, well used community site and get more people active as a result.