

Leisure & Rec Committee Report

Title: Mannington Drainage Survey

Committee: Leisure & Recreation Committee

Date: 4th December 2025

Officer: Andrew Briggs

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To present the findings of the Grounds Management Association (GMA) technical assessment of Mannington Recreation Ground.

1.2 To set out a proposed phased improvement scheme focused on drainage and grass pitch quality.

1.3 To confirm that the Council does not have the capital resources to deliver the full improvement scheme from its own budgets and that any works will depend on securing substantial external funding from National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and other partners.

1.4 To seek approval to progress only to project development and funding bid stage at this time, including commissioning detailed surveys, outline design and costed specifications to support grant applications.

1.5 To clarify the role and responsibilities of the Environment Agency (EA) in relation to flooding and the River Ray, and to set out the specific actions the Council will take to engage with the EA and other risk management authorities.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

2.1 **Note** the GMA Technical Assessment of Mannington Recreation Ground (November 2025), which concludes that:

- existing pitches are rated “Poor” against GMA Performance Quality Standards;
- existing drainage systems are largely ineffective; and
- with investment, the site has the potential to accommodate a high capacity programme of adult and youth football and other community sport.

2.2 **Agree in principle** the preferred technical solution outlined by the GMA, namely:

- installation of a new pipe drainage system (with potential for future sand slit / sand banding enhancement) across the main playing area capable of accommodating up to 8 senior equivalent pitches.
- exclusion of the lowest northeastern area (current “Pitch 9”) from the initial drainage scheme due to its greater flood/sedimentation risk;
- associated minor releveling, reseeding, weed control and strengthened ongoing maintenance.

2.3 Confirm that the Council currently has no allocated capital budget for the implementation of the full drainage and pitch improvement scheme and cannot proceed to construction without significant external grant funding and/or partner contributions.

2.4 Authorise officers to proceed only with project development work, specifically to:

a. Commission the minimum set of surveys and investigations needed to prepare for funding applications, including:

- a detailed topographical and utilities survey of the playing field;
- targeted investigation of existing drainage outfalls and ditches (including limited mini digger works and CCTV where necessary);
- any essential arboriculture and ecological scoping work linked to drainage and access proposals.

b. Commission a suitably qualified turf/drainage consultant (which may include the GMA) to develop:

- an outline drainage and pitch improvement design based on the GMA recommendations;
- a costed specification and phasing plan suitable for inclusion in funding bids;
- an outline long term maintenance plan aligned with GMA “Good” standard.

c. Prepare and submit funding applications to relevant bodies, including (but not limited to): Football Foundation, County FA, Sport England and other applicable sport/community funders.

d. Engage with local clubs, leagues and community partners to evidence demand and secure letters of support and, where feasible, partnership funding.

e. Formally engage with the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk authorities (see Section 8) to:

- confirm flood risk status and responsibilities;
- seek technical advice on drainage outfalls, floodplain design and consents;
- explore opportunities for partnership working where appropriate.

f. Report back to Committee with:

- the outcome of funding applications and negotiations;
- a proposed funding package (including any required Council match-funding);
- a recommended delivery programme and updated risk and maintenance implications,

before any commitment is made to tender or implement capital works.

3. Background

3.1 Central Swindon North Parish Council manages several recreation sites, including Mannington Recreation Ground.

3.2 Mannington is a strategically located grass pitch site with a pavilion and car park off Paddington Drive. Access to the main pitches is via a narrow track and a pedestrian footbridge across the River Ray, with long walking distances to the furthest pitches and constrained parking at busy times.

3.3 Historically, up to 9 adult pitches plus junior and mini soccer layouts have been marked out. Currently, only around 4 adult pitches are in regular winter use due to poor drainage and access limitations.

3.4 The Council is in year 5 of a 7 year Football Foundation Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund grant. This supports enhanced maintenance but is not sufficient to finance major capital drainage works; further capital funding is required to unlock the site's full potential.

3.5 The GMA was commissioned to provide a technical assessment and outline recommendations, including indicative costs, for bringing the pitches up to at least "Good" standard and maximising playable capacity.

4. Summary of GMA Technical Findings

4.1 Site & Soils

- Total site approx. 15.3 ha, with c. 9.4 ha usable grass playing field.
- Soils are slowly permeable, seasonally wet loamy/clayey soils with impeded drainage and high susceptibility to compaction when wet.
- Trial pits show 200 - 250mm clay loam topsoil over very firm clayey subsoil, with evidence of prolonged waterlogging.

4.2 Levels & Gradients

- The field falls approx. 4m over 300m (about 1:75 / 1.5%), within Sport England recommended gradients for natural turf pitches.
- Only localised areas (particularly around the current Pitch 1) require minor re-levelling.

4.3 Drainage & Flood Risk Context

- Several generations of historic drains are present but largely ineffective, with:
 - silted and blocked stone backfill drains;
 - probable root ingress from trees;
 - uncertain or collapsed outfalls to the River Ray and boundary ditches.
- The site lies within Environment Agency Flood Zones 2 & 3, indicating risk from river flooding in more extreme events, but local evidence suggests that routine pitch problems are mainly caused by poor drainage and high water tables rather than frequent river overtopping.

4.4 Pitch Condition

- Grass cover is generally reasonable but with:
 - significant weed grass and broad leaved weeds;
 - heavily worn and uneven areas, particularly on the pitch nearest the footbridge;
 - compaction and poor infiltration.
- Overall, the playing surface is graded “Poor” against GMA Performance Quality Standards; the target for Mannington is “Good”.

4.5 Other Constraints

- Major foul sewers and utilities cross the site, with surface chambers affecting pitch layout and requiring accurate mapping.
- Two artificial cricket strips are present and must be accommodated or relocated in any future layout.

5. Proposed Technical Approach (Subject to Funding)

5.1 Phase 1 – Drainage & Pitch Improvement

The GMA recommends a phased drainage solution on the more easily drainable central and western portions of the field, capable of hosting up to 8 senior equivalent pitches. Key elements include:

- New primary pipe drainage network connected to reliable outfalls to the River Ray or boundary ditches, designed to avoid tree root interference.
- Provision for later installation of secondary drainage (sand slitting/banding) as usage and funding justify.
- Exclusion of the lowest, northeastern area (“Pitch 9”) from the initial scheme, with potential repurposing (e.g. ecological enhancement) in the future.
- Minor regrading of local undulations (particularly in the current Pitch 1 zone).
- Full reseeding with high quality perennial ryegrass sports mixtures, targeted fertilisation based on soil tests, and comprehensive weed control.
- An enhanced maintenance regime including regular decompaction, scarifying/fraise mowing, overseeding, sand topdressing of high wear areas and appropriate fertiliser and weed control programmes.

5.2 Strategic Development Options (Longer Term)

Longer term opportunities (not costed in detail at this stage) include:

- potential relocation or expansion of pavilion and parking to a more central western location off Paddington Drive;
- improved vehicular access and reduced reliance on the footbridge;
- reconfiguration of pitch layouts to better serve different age groups and formats;

- possible future provision of an all weather pitch and additional recreational features, subject to demand and funding.

These strategic elements are **not** being brought forward for approval now; they would only be developed further if viable funding routes emerge.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Capital Scheme (Main Works)

6.1.1 The GMA report includes an indicative budget estimate for the full drainage and pitch improvement scheme (Phase 1). The detailed cost breakdown is set out in the report (Fig. 31).

6.1.2 These indicative costs:

- cover the redrainage and improvement of the main playing area plus associated works;
- exclude VAT;
- include a recommended minimum contingency of 10% (with scope to increase to reflect risk and inflation);
- are based on current market rates and may increase.

6.1.3 At present, **no capital budget** exists within the Council's approved programme to deliver the main works. The Council cannot proceed to construction without substantial external funding and/or partner contributions.

6.2 Initial Project-Development Costs (Surveys, Design & Bids)

6.2.1 To reach a tender ready proposition, a series of steps are needed. These are significantly lower cost than the main works but still need budget provision, including:

- topographical and utilities survey.
- drainage investigations and CCTV/outfall checks.
- outline drainage and pitch-improvement design and specification.
- any essential arboriculture/ecological scoping.
- preparation of funding bid documentation (including demand analysis, programme, and maintenance plans).

6.2.2 The precise cost of this work will depend on procurement route and scope. For the purposes of this report, Members are asked to note:

- early stage survey and design work is likely to require a modest but distinct budget circa £5-7k
- where possible, development costs will be minimised by using existing data and internal resources and by including eligible fees within any future grant funded project budget.

- officers will not commission work beyond existing approved budgets without further Committee approval.

6.2.3 The Committee is therefore asked to:

- endorse in principle the commissioning of surveys and outline design/specification, subject to quotations and identification of funding.
- note that exact figures will be brought back once quotations are received.

6.3 Revenue Implications

6.3.1 In the short term, existing revenue budgets (including the Football Foundation Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund) will continue to support maintenance and minor improvements.

6.3.2 In the longer term, successful delivery of the drainage scheme is expected to:

- increase playable capacity and reduce cancellations.
- improve reliability for local clubs and leagues.
- require a higher but more structured and efficient maintenance regime, which will need to be reflected in future revenue planning.

7. Legal, Governance & Procurement

7.1 The Council, as leaseholder and site operator, must ensure that any works comply with:

- health and safety legislation and CDM Regulations.
- environmental and flood risk legislation.
- planning and building control requirements where applicable.
- the Council's own Contract Procedure Rules and wider procurement law.

7.2 Any future pavilion relocation, access changes or disposal of surplus land (e.g. at the existing pavilion site) would require separate legal, planning and governance processes and is not sought for approval through this report.

7.3 Works in, over, under or within the floodplain of a Main River typically require Environment Agency consent/permits (Flood Risk Activities Environmental Permit). The detailed consenting route will be confirmed as part of the proposed engagement with the EA (Section 8). [GOV.UK+1](#)

8. Environment Agency Responsibilities & Required Follow Up Actions

8.1 Environment Agency – General Responsibilities

In England, the Environment Agency:

- has a strategic overview of all sources of flood and coastal erosion risk, providing national leadership on flood risk management strategy; [GOV.UK+1](#)
- is responsible for producing Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) for areas where flooding may occur from main rivers, the sea and reservoirs.

- has permissive powers, but not a duty, to carry out maintenance and improvement works on designated main rivers to manage flood risk.

The Local Lead Flood Authority (the unitary council) is usually responsible for local sources of flood risk (surface water, ordinary watercourses, small streams and drainage ditches).

[Local Government Association+1](#)

8.2 Riparian Responsibilities (Council & Neighbours)

Where the Council (or adjacent landowners) owns land beside the River Ray or adjoining ditches, it is likely to be a riparian owner and therefore responsible for:

- allowing water to flow naturally through its land without obstruction.
- maintaining watercourses and removing blockages that may increase flood risk;
- maintaining the bed, banks and any structures (culverts, screens, etc.) in its ownership.

The EA does not take over riparian maintenance responsibilities simply because a watercourse is designated as a main river, but it can advise and, in some circumstances, exercise its permissive powers where there is wider flood risk benefit.

8.3 How the Environment Agency Should Assist in This Project

Within its existing statutory role and powers, the EA would be expected to:

- **Provide flood-risk information and mapping** relevant to the site (historic flood events, modelled flood extents and depths, climate-change allowances) to inform design and layout options.
- **Advise on design principles** for drainage outfalls and any works within the functional floodplain, ensuring no increase in flood risk elsewhere and, where possible, achieving betterment.
- **Set out permitting requirements and timescales** for works affecting the river channel, banks or floodplain, and provide pre-application guidance on Flood Risk Activities permits.
- **Coordinate with the Lead Local Flood Authority and the Council** to ensure the scheme aligns with local Flood Risk Management Plans and strategies.
- Where feasible, **explore opportunities for partnership working** (e.g. aligning any river maintenance or small scale improvements with the Council's project) where this would deliver wider flood-risk or environmental benefits, recognising that its powers are permissive rather than mandatory.

The EA is not obliged to fund sports pitch drainage; however, its technical input and coordination on flood risk issues are essential to ensure the project is compliant and resilient.

8.4 Proposed Follow-Up Actions with the Environment Agency

If Members approve this report, officers will:

1. **Formally write to the EA (local Flood & Coastal Risk Management / Partnerships team)** enclosing:
 - the GMA technical report.
 - a plan of the proposed Phase 1 drainage area.
 - a summary of known flooding and drainage issues at Mannington.
2. **Request a joint meeting/site visit** with the EA and the Lead Local Flood Authority to:
 - confirm whether the relevant reach of the River Ray is designated as a Main River.
 - clarify responsibilities between EA, the unitary authority and riparian owners for channel and bank maintenance.
 - discuss options for secure, unclogged outfalls and ditch connections.
 - identify any EA strategic schemes or programmes the site should be considered within.
3. **Seek written pre-application advice** from the EA on:
 - the need for Flood Risk Activities permits for any proposed works in/near the river or floodplain.
 - design parameters (finished levels, flood storage, conveyance) for any re-grading or access works that might affect flood risk.
4. **Request and incorporate EA data** into the project development work, including:
 - flood maps for planning.
 - modelled flood levels and climate-change allowances.
 - any recorded history of flooding at Mannington.
5. **Explore partnership opportunities** where there is mutual benefit, for example:
 - joint working on any riverbank stabilisation, outfall repair or modest natural-flood management features that could be combined with pitch-drainage improvements.
 - potential inclusion of small-scale works at Mannington within wider EA programmes if they align with their priorities (recognising competition for limited national funding).
6. **Report back to Committee** with the outcome of EA engagement, clearly setting out:
 - roles and responsibilities agreed for watercourse and outfall maintenance.
 - permitting requirements, likely conditions and timescales.
 - any opportunities or constraints arising from EA advice that affect scheme scope, design or cost.

9. Risk Assessment

Key risks include:

- **Funding risk:** external funding may not be secured or may be lower than required, preventing or scaling back delivery.
- **Cost escalation:** inflation and limited specialist contractor capacity may increase costs beyond initial estimates.
- **Technical risk:** further investigations may reveal more complex ground/drainage conditions.
- **Flood & environmental risk:** designs must be compatible with EA flood risk guidance and environmental requirements; delays in obtaining permits could affect programme.
- **Programme risk:** pitch closures during works need careful coordination with leagues and users.

These risks will be managed through phased design, early engagement with the EA and funders, and returning to Members at key decision points.

10. Equalities, Health & Wellbeing

10.1 Mannington Recreation Ground provides accessible outdoor sport opportunities for a wide range of residents. Improved pitch quality and reliability of play would support participation across genders and age groups, promote physical activity and benefit mental wellbeing.

10.2 No negative equalities impacts are identified at this early stage; a fuller assessment will be undertaken if and when a funded scheme moves to implementation.

11. Climate & Environmental Considerations

11.1 Improved drainage and pitch quality should reduce severe waterlogging and associated damage, potentially lowering the need for heavy emergency interventions.

11.2 Any scheme will seek to:

- protect and, where possible, enhance tree cover and biodiversity, particularly in the lowest, more flood-affected areas which may be better suited to ecological enhancement than intensive sport;
- avoid unnecessary soil export/import and minimise carbon impacts during construction;
- ensure that any riverbank or floodplain works follow EA guidance and contribute positively to local flood-risk and habitat objectives.

12. Consultation

12.1 The GMA report has involved on site discussion with Council officers and informal engagement with local residents during the site visit.

12.2 As project development progresses, further consultation is proposed with:

- local football and cricket clubs, leagues and other pitch users.
- Ward Members.
- relevant community groups and stakeholders.
- the Environment Agency and Lead Local Flood Authority.

13. Options Considered

- **Option 1 – Do nothing (continue current maintenance only).**
 - Lowest immediate cost but perpetuates poor quality, lost games and underutilisation of a key site.
- **Option 2 – Council funded capital works.**
 - Currently unaffordable and not recommended given the absence of allocated capital budget.
- **Option 3 – Preferred: externally funded improvement scheme, starting with project development, EA engagement and funding bids.**
 - Develop a robust, funding scheme based on GMA recommendations.
 - secure substantial NGB and other external funding (if available).
 - align proposals with EA guidance and permissions.
 - only move to construction if an affordable, compliant funding package is secured and approved by Members.

14. Next Steps (if Recommendations Approved)

Officers will:

1. Seek quotations and identify funding for essential surveys and outline design/specification work.
2. Commission the agreed project development tasks (within budgetary limits).
3. Engage proactively with the Football Foundation, County FA and other funders to explore and progress funding opportunities.
4. Open formal engagement with the Environment Agency as set out in Section 8.4.
5. Develop a clear, phased delivery plan and detailed costings for inclusion in funding bids.

6. Report back to Committee with confirmed development costs, funding-bid outcomes, EA feedback and a proposed funding and delivery package, including any implications for Council capital and revenue budgets.