

Football Bookings

Committee: Leisure & Recreation Committee

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Project Title: Football Booking Management Concerns

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Members of ongoing issues relating to football pitch bookings, access control, and payment compliance across Council owned football facilities, and to present practical options for improving oversight, reducing misuse, and safeguarding Council income.

2. Background

The Council operates a number of football sites, providing pitches, changing facilities and associated amenities for use by local clubs and leagues.

Bookings have been managed via an online platform, with teams and leagues responsible for:

- Making bookings and arranging payments.
- Accessing facilities using provided codes or keys.
- Securing sites before and after matches.

This model was designed to streamline administration and reduce staffing requirements but relies heavily on self policing by clubs and oversight by leagues, with limited direct Council involvement once access is provided.

Recent incidents have shown that this approach is no longer fit for purpose and leaves the Council exposed to financial, operational, and reputational risks.

3. Current Issues and Challenges

A review of the football booking and access process has identified several key issues:

- **Unauthorised Use:** Teams are playing matches without making a booking.
- **Nonpayment:** Teams are booking facilities but failing to pay, often citing invoicing terms.
- **External Misuse:** Pitches allocated to specific leagues are being used by other groups.
- **Access Oversight:** Individuals are often issued keys or door codes, allowing them unrestricted access to facilities with little control over who is using them and when.

This has led to lost income, increased wear and tear on facilities, inaccurate usage records, and heightened reputational risk. It has also created a lack of clarity around who is responsible for ensuring compliance with booking terms and conditions.

4. Booking and Payment Reconciliation

A further concern is the reconciliation of bookings and payments, which has become increasingly difficult under the current system. Examples include:

- Bookings being made without corresponding payments.
- Payments being received with no matching booking record.
- Matches taking place with no booking or payment traceable through existing systems.

This disconnect has created gaps in financial reporting and reduced confidence in the accuracy of usage and income data.

Officers are actively reviewing internal processes to identify the most effective solutions for improving reconciliation.

5. Site Access Summary and Priority Actions

While booking and payment compliance issues exist across all sites, the level of risk varies based on how access is managed at each location:

Site	Current Access Control	Observations
Mannington	Main door secured by code lock, with internal doors also on codes.	Access is relatively well controlled. Risk is low if codes are updated periodically.
Southbrook	Two doors, both secured with code locks.	Effective control in place. Minimal unauthorised use reported.
Seven Fields	Main gate secured, but a single internal door contains keys to all other areas. Once accessed, all spaces are open.	Highest risk site. Once the internal key door is accessed, all areas are vulnerable to misuse. This site accounts for most incidents of noncompliance and unauthorised access.

The Council's immediate priority should be to address vulnerabilities at Seven Fields, where the current system undermines access control entirely. Recommended actions include:

- Replacing the key doors with a mechanical or digital code lock or:
- Removing stored keys and securing all internal doors individually.
- Linking code issuance directly to confirmed bookings and payments.
- Considering Seven Fields as the pilot site for any future digital access system.

6. Mitigation Options

Option A – Enhanced Oversight (Short Term)

- Require leagues to submit fixture schedules for crosschecking.
- Share booking and payment reports regularly for validation.
- Notify leagues of noncompliant teams for league level enforcement.

Pros: Low cost, quick to implement.

Cons: Still reliant on self policing.

Option B – Mechanical Code Locks (Medium Term)

- Replace traditional key locks with mechanical pushbutton code locks.
- Codes issued only once booking and payment are confirmed.
- Codes changed periodically to prevent misuse.

Pros: Improved control, no electricity or software required, lower cost.

Cons: Requires staff time to update codes and communicate them.

Example: [Kaba Unican Simplex LR1011-26D-41 Lever Operated Right Hand Digital Lock Satin Chrome - AC Leigh Ironmongery](#)

mechanical code lock costs approx. **£486 per door**.

For a site with 11 doors: **£5,300 – £5,500** for hardware plus installation.

Codes can be changed without removing the lock, and no batteries or software are required.



Option C – Digital Access Control (Long Term)

- Install electronic access systems linked to booking and payment records.
- Codes activate automatically for confirmed sessions.
- Full audit trail of site usage.

Pros: Highest level of security and automation.

Cons: Significant capital and ongoing costs.

Estimated cost: **£800 – £1,000+ per door** (£8k – £11,000+ for 11 doors), plus licensing and maintenance.

Example System: Paxton Net2

The Paxton Net2 system is a comprehensive networked access control solution which demonstrates the level of automation and control available with modern access management. paxton-access.com

Key features include:

- Networked controller and door readers/keypads tied into central software.
- End to end access control: no keys required, access can be granted remotely.
- Ability to “start simple, expand as and when you need to”, scalable for multiple doors/sites.
- Licence free and free software upgrades, making the software side more manageable.
- Integration capability with other security systems, meaning it could link with booking/payment systems or site monitoring.

Application to our sites:

- For sites such as Seven Fields (with multiple internal access doors and higher risk), a system like Net2 would permit:
 - Access only granted once a booking & payment is confirmed.
 - Central oversight of which doors are accessed and when (audit trail).
 - Remote disabling of access if a team is non compliant.
- Because it is scalable, it could be installed at the most problematic site first (Seven Fields) then expanded to other sites (e.g., Southbrook, Mannington) as budgets permit.

7. Comparison of Options

Feature	Status Quo	Mechanical Code Locks	Digital Access System
Cost per Door	£0	£486	£600 - £1,000+
11 Doors Cost	N/A	£5,300–£5,500	£6,600 - £11,000+
Ongoing Costs	None	Low (staff admin)	Medium High
Access Control	Low	Medium	High
Security Risk	High	Medium	Low
Booking Integration	None	Manual	Full
Audit Trail	None	Limited	Full

8. Examples from Other Councils

Several smaller local authorities use mechanical code locks or hybrid systems to balance cost and control:

- **Charvil Parish Council (Berkshire):** Door codes issued after booking and payment confirmed.
- **Mickleton Parish Council (Gloucestershire):** Code sent automatically once payment is received.
- **Ulleskelf Parish Council (North Yorkshire):** Access codes updated annually and prioritised for paid users.
- **Abbots Langley Parish Council (Hertfordshire):** Manual booking process via staff contact ensures oversight.

These examples show that low tech solutions can significantly reduce misuse when combined with tighter processes and enforcement.

9. Financial Implications

- Mechanical code locks: £5,300 – £5,500 for 11 doors (hardware only)
- Digital access system: £8k – £11,000+ for 11 doors

Additional costs: Installation, potential wiring, ongoing administration, and in the case of digital systems, software licensing and support.

10. Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

1. **Note** the current challenges and risks associated with football pitch bookings, payments, and access control.
2. **Approve** immediate focus on improving access control and compliance at Seven Fields.
3. **Support** the introduction of mechanical code locks as a cost effective interim measure, with codes issued only following confirmed booking and payment.
4. **Request** a feasibility assessment of long term digital access solutions, including potential phased implementation or funding opportunities.
5. **Note** that officers are actively reviewing reconciliation processes to improve financial tracking and reporting.