

# Torrige Playzones

## Community Engagement Report

24<sup>th</sup> May 2024

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### Introduction

This report presents the conclusions following two months of engagement to explore how target audiences in priority places feel about being active and the resources, opportunities and facilities in their local areas.

The engagement activity was inspired and guided by funding opportunities through the Playzones programme, and was kindly funded by the Football Foundation. However it was carefully focused on local needs and opportunities in order to provide the best solutions for Torrige, and inform a range of projects. To ensure relevance, we worked closely with local partners and are eternally grateful for their support.



We set out to find out what opportunities and access are needed across four key communities with a focus on facilities and activities.

During April and May 2024 we engaged with over 500 people across the district of Torridge to begin to discuss the role of community facilities in helping inactive people to get active, and the barriers and gaps in provision that people felt were making it harder for them to be active.

At the heart of our community engagement is our desire to reduce health, activity and societal inequalities.

We set out to target people in groups known to be inactive, including: women and girls, people from lower socio economic groups, people from minority ethnic and cultural communities, and people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. As well as these we worked to build links with existing community groups and residential communities in and close to target places.

To ensure relevance, we focused into localities, and worked with community partners to deliver focus groups, attend events, and to hold meetings, and discuss solutions. We are immensely grateful for this support in engaging local people.



## Context

Torridge is a largely rural and coastal district of Northern Devon. Its district council is based in the town of Bideford. The district also includes the towns of Great Torrington, Holsworthy and Northam, along with numerous villages and surrounding rural areas. The population of Torridge is around 68,500. In the last census period (2011 – 2021) there was an increase of 30.2% in people aged 65 years and over (compared to 20% national average), a decrease of 0.6% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 1.6% in children aged under 15 years.

Torridge is the second least densely populated of the South West's 30 local authority areas, add to this the relatively low car ownership levels and mediocre public transport and this means that many people in Torridge have limited access to services and can be rurally isolated.

Torridge is the least physically active district in Devon. ([Sport England Active Lives Survey](#))

Disability levels are amongst the highest in Devon, surpassed only by Torbay and Plymouth.

Engagement work by One Northern Devon ( NHS Local Care Partnership) identified the following as key barriers for people living in the area:

- Poor transport infrastructure
- Lack of affordable housing
- Poverty
- Geographical remoteness and rurality
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Low wage economy

Parts of Torridge fall within the 2nd and 3rd decile of deprivation according to the IMD.

In the Torridge Area, accessing sports facilities poses significant challenges due to its rural nature, low household incomes, and inadequate public transport. With many communities spread out across the countryside, residents often face long travel distances to reach sports facilities, making it difficult for those without personal transportation.

Furthermore, low household incomes limit access to sports clubs and gym memberships, as they can be costly. Poor public transport infrastructure exacerbates these issues, as it restricts the ability of residents to commute to nearby towns or cities for sporting activities. These challenges create barriers for individuals and families looking to engage in physical activity, impacting both physical health and community cohesion.

## Methodology

With tight timescales and deadlines we designed a S.M.A.R.T Community Engagement approach that was both ambitious in its reach, depth and diversity of response but also achievable within the number of weeks we had to undertake the work.

We immediately began speaking to key partners and stakeholders and developed a line of questioning and the following methods to engage the community.

- In depth conversations with stakeholders
- A digital survey for partner organisations
- A digital survey for members of the public in our target communities
- Face to face engagement at events in target communities
- Activation of a community partner to expand the offer
- Targeting of priority audiences for engagement
- Public survey also shared locally on social media





We used existing partners and identified new community organisations who we knew had reach to our priority audiences and also identified existing events and opportunities to engage groups.

## Common Themes and Key Takeaways

There is a growing sense of public frustration, particularly in Bideford, about the lack of accessible all-weather surfaces for sporting activities.



The absence of such facilities limits the options for residents to engage in sports year-round, especially during inclement weather conditions common in the area. Many community members express disappointment in the limited opportunities for outdoor activities due to the lack of suitable playing surfaces.

This frustration underscores the need for investment in infrastructure to provide accessible and all-weather sporting facilities, addressing the demands and aspirations of the local population.

### Priority Audience stakeholder feedback

#### Lower Socio Economic groups:

In a highly deprived area, the need for a 3G all-weather community play area is critical, representing not just a recreational space, but a beacon of hope and opportunity for the local residents. Such an area would serve as a vital lifeline, offering a safe and accessible environment for children and families to engage in physical activity, socialize, and foster a sense of community spirit. In an area where resources are scarce and options for leisure are limited, this facility would provide a sanctuary where children can play and explore, regardless of the weather or time of year. Beyond its recreational value, the play area could act as a catalyst for positive change, promoting health and well-being, reducing anti-social behavior, and instilling a sense of pride and ownership within the community. Its presence would not only enrich the lives of current residents but also lay the foundation for a brighter future, where every child has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. Would be prepared to fundraise and to be on a management group.

"More area and venues at a reasonable price to provide sporting activities inside and out."

The community aspect is important to Partners. They have concerns about the cost to hire facilities, the management of the facilities and whether it would have caretaker, be bookable / lockable etc.

Partners emphasized the need to have access to more free facilities - tennis courts in Bideford and Torrington, affordable swim sessions for all, netball/basketball courts available for all to use, more play parks. More outside gym parks. Access to Tennis and table tennis courts. Leisure Centre in Bideford Poor transport links between sports facilities and villages make it difficult for youngsters to access clubs and facilities. This also increases the carbon footprint of exercise, as cars are needed to get participants to centres.

### **Disabled people and people with long term health conditions**



"We need Accessible venues"

Partners highlighted the importance of accessible facilities, which are particularly lacking for those with complex and multiple needs. HAF provides for 1600 SEND children. Playzone would ideally have accessible changing and toilet facilities (Changing Spaces) which can be accessed independently.

"we need a undercover astro somewhere that is affordable for clubs and people to use"

"Most of our current users have additional needs - physical and mental health plus problems with

transport so it is important not just to consider the provision of playing fields/other sports facilities but how accessible these are for people with additional needs. We have also found that many people do not have suitable clothing for outdoor activities and this can be a barrier. Also people might need a 'buddy' to have the confidence to try a new activity."

There is a need for venues that either follow Access for all Guidance for clubs/volunteers or Sport England Accessible and Inclusive Sports Facilities for more technical information. Coaches and volunteers with ability to access training and guidance to support developments skills. Opportunities to partner with audiences they wish to connect with."


Partners expressed a need an all weather training pitch at Pollyfield. Shamwicks Rovers has plan for women's football and girls' football and already have a disability team. For the disability team they need something local to them because transport is a big barrier. They would make really good use of the facility and be happy to be on a management board.



"I would like to see activities that are accessible by public transport that have a fair and reasonable cost to access also that are designed inside the space to meet the needs of disabled users not just a ramp where disabled people in our community can really join an and build

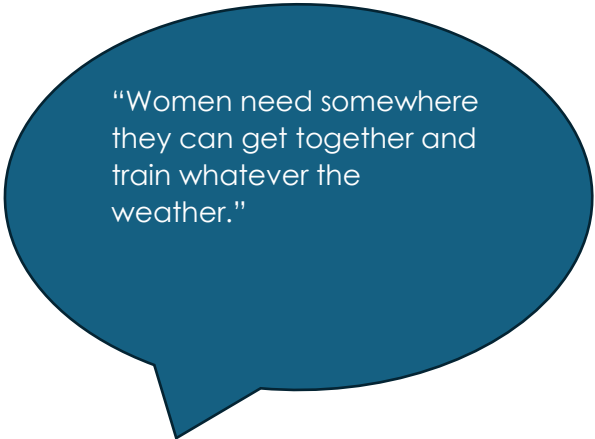
## Women and Girls

The women's football Team in Appledore are limited with places to train, especially with the Rugby Club taking over Kingsley. Facilities are needed in Bideford or Northam areas. Needs to be central. Lot of Women's Clubs are emerging but no training facilities, girls football also taking off. Mainly needed as a safe and accessible place for training. Low activity levels over the winter due to the wet. Ideally FA regulated surface to play small sided games. Needs to be 3G and bookable so that they have a safe space. Need more all-weather surfaces in general. Toilet facilities also needed. Floodlit. Men's football is on a Saturday and women's on a Sunday so often the pitch has been played on on the Saturday and cut up so it can't be used.



"Only One night available for football and this is taken up with Men's Teams."

We need: "All weather areas with access to all"



"Women need somewhere they can get together and train whatever the weather."

We need: 3G pitches

More facilities needed across North Devon. Girls' Football growing. Teams are having to travel to find all weather surfaces. Agreed to share partner survey with Torridge Clubs.

The more facilities the better, particular appetite in Torrington, One partner was keen to support Playzones and would be interested in using a facility for 3v3 football, walking football and multi-sports. We need: "More multiuse areas that can be used 12 months of the year, the playzones look fantastic and

could really make a fab hub for local community sport

Bideford should have a facility, not East the Water but Bideford. Suggested King George V playing fields, College Park. The school is difficult to deal with. School facilities are poor and not looked after. Even lighting not maintained so playing in the dark. People don't want to be training at the school, there should be a proper public facility. It needs to be local, and must be "in town". Transport is a barrier. Women's Football is gaining popularity but needs proper facilities locally. Skate Park area should have been a 3G pitch. Facilities need to be bookable, clean, safe area, no mud. Must be 3G for football. A Town the size of Bideford should have some investment. Playzone a good start but a 3G pitch is also required

Many partners said more pitches are needed. The school is difficult to access, and expensive. Girls' football is growing fast and need more places. Large girls' section at Bideford. Barnstaple facility is good but nothing in Bideford. Distance to other places is a barrier.

## Ethnically diverse communities

Local Ukranian communities are often isolated from opportunities due to the language barrier, lack of funds to participate, confusion about what is available and where. Local charity Sunrise Diversity is aware of instances of intimidation, bullying and racism in sport, so education and training is needed.



"Sport has the potential to be a great leveler, and an excellent way for people to build a sense of community."



# Survey responses

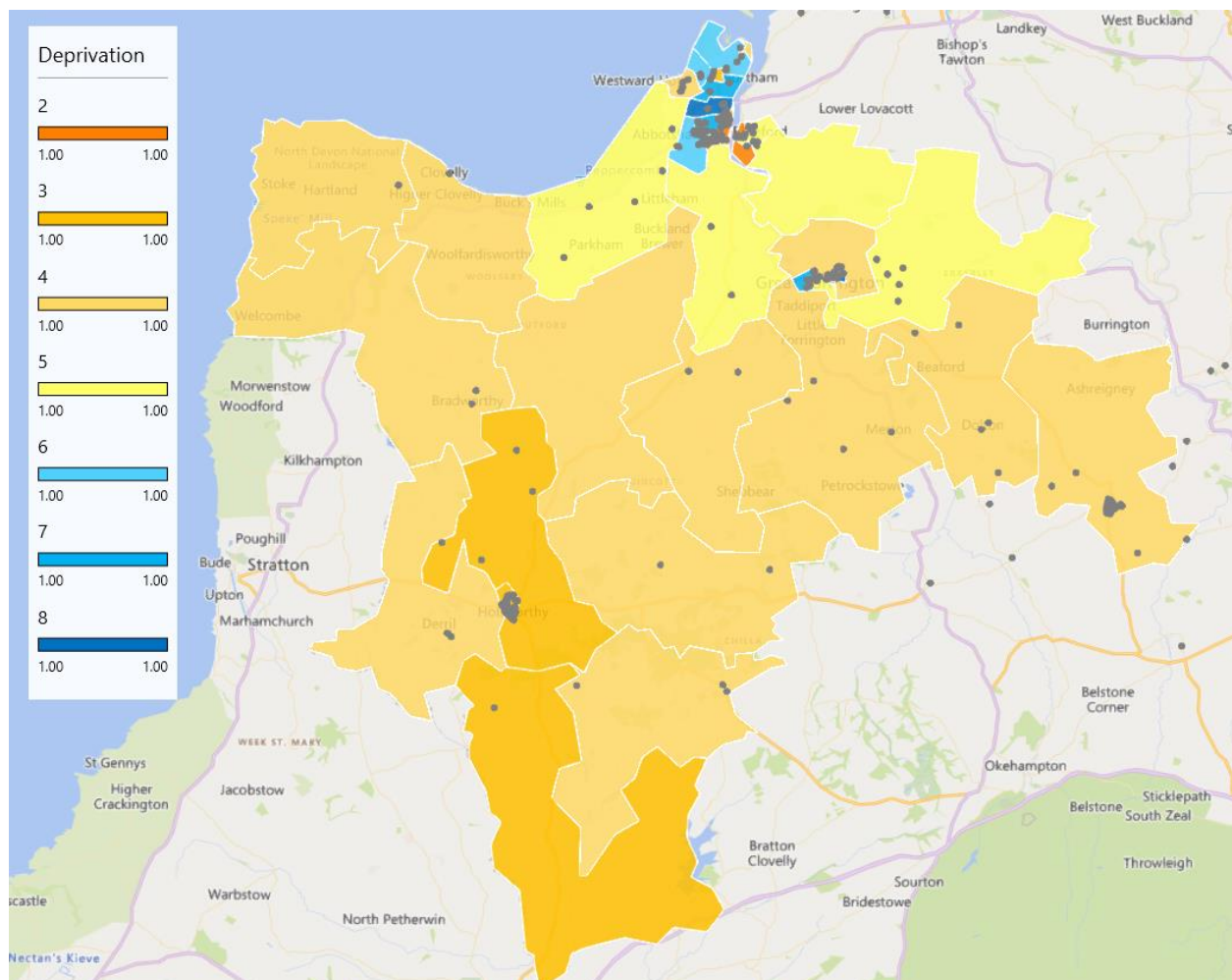
We circulated a survey to members of the public via events, community organisations and within our target communities. We also circulated a separate survey to partners and stakeholders. Below is a summary of the results from across the district of Torridge. Place specific feedback is also included in the place summaries further below.

## Number of responses

Public survey – 330

Partner survey – 42

## Geographic survey spread by deprivation



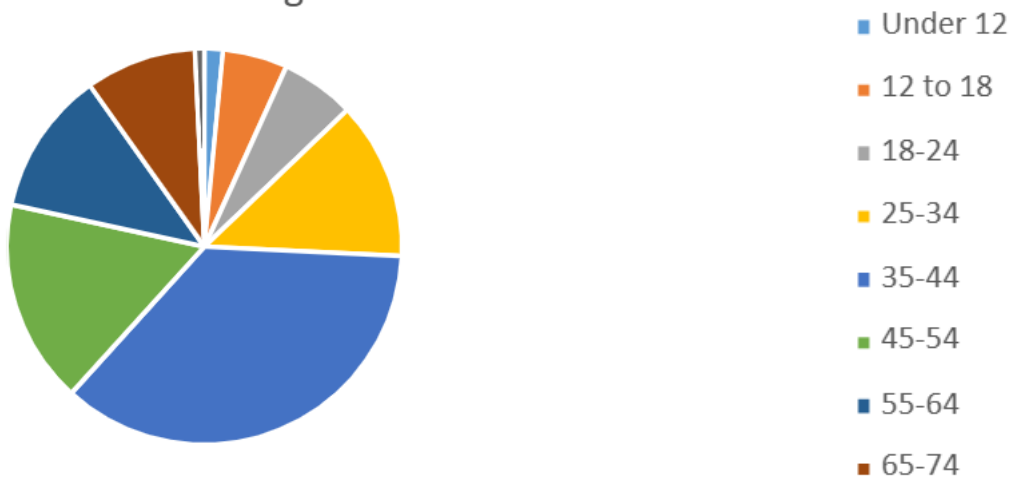


## Demographics

### Gender



### Age



### Ethnicity



- White
- Other ethnic group
- Mixed
- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British

### IMD Decile



- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

## Observations

It was good to see a majority female response of around 60% and a good spread of ages including children and young people.

IMD deciles 3 and 4 are strongly represented, we feel that the pockets of higher deprivation are less likely to respond to such a survey but we have reached some.

The Ethnically Diverse Community response seems low but is actually roughly equal to the actual percentage of the population in Torridge.

People with long term conditions or disabilities are well represented.

Analysis of the postcodes of responders we can see a good spread across the target communities with high responses from Bideford, Holsworthy and Winkleigh in particular.

## Most popular sports mentioned

30% of all survey responses mentioned Football

6% mentioned Rugby

6% mentioned Netball

2% mentioned Basketball



## Facilities Needed

15% mentioned "All-Weather"

One partner said "we need walking football, walking cricket, walking rounders, walking tennis"

A rubberized surface is the preference for netball, it can't be played on 2G or 3G surface. Would like to see more walking netball but cannot source hosts. Walking netball very popular with WI and U3A in other regions, Local Netball NGB rep would like to replicate this in Torridge area.



## Messages

On a scale of 1 to 5 around two thirds of respondents responded 1 or 2 when asked whether current facilities met their needs

The top 4 barriers to activity were:

- Lack of all weather playing surfaces
- Lack of a local facility
- Cost
- It's not at suitable times
- Other significant barriers included **transport, a lack of coached or volunteers, confidence and also the timings of sports sessions and activities.**
- 

**Caveats** - It is worth noting that a lot of surveys were shared at sports or football events and via sports clubs/contacts.




## Partner Survey

We had a good spread of partner responses from across the area.


Very few partners felt the needs of their communities were being met by current facilities with around 95% feeling they could be better served.

All weather, accessible multi sport pitches were mentioned many times as something that would be good for the community. These should be subsidised or free for lower socio economic groups.



Multi use all weather areas so  
people can play all sports in them

Transport and growing communities were also highlighted.



Poor transport links between sports  
facilities and villages make it difficult  
for youngsters to access clubs and  
facilities. Also increases carbon  
footprint of exercise, as cars are  
needed to get participants to centres.

# Place summaries

**Site name:** Polyfields

**What Three Words:** ///prancing.worm.sizzled



**Partnership / Management:** Multi Disciplinary Committee (Polyfields users)

**Funding options:** Torridge District Council, Bridge Trust Bideford Town Council

**Community Engagement response**

Many community members express disappointment in the limited opportunities for outdoor activities due to the lack of suitable playing surfaces.

Strongly supported locally

**Concerns:** Proximity of residential / planning issues

**Identified sports:** Football, Multi sports, school use

**Design:** 3G / parent shelters

**Narrative:** No other sports raised as local need. A Playzone would be a good fit for this location. Recognised deprived area.

**Priority Groups:** Disability football, potential girl's football

**Site:** Alverdiscott Road

**What Three Words:** ///topic.diamonds.escalated



**Partnership / Management:** Active Torridge

**Funding options:** Torridge District Council, Bridge Trust, Bideford Town Council. \$106

**Community Engagement response**

Lack of facilities, people don't feel their needs are met.

**Concerns:** No local support identified for this location, remote from sporting centre / club

**Identified sports:** Football, Multi sports

**Design:** potential rubberised / 3G? Open site.

**Narrative:** This a potential refurbishment site, currently open and used by young people to meet, cycle, and occasional ball games. Good proximity to local primary school which lacks outdoor space. The preferred site in East the Water is Polyfields, however if Polyfields was not viable then there is a potential to make this site work. It could be a cheaper alternative as it is a refurbishment and may be of good value to the school.

**Priority Groups:** LSEG



**Site:** King George V

**What3Words:** [///scorecard.halt.grant](https://www.what3words.com/scorecard.halt.grant)



**Partnership / Management:** Active Torridge Bideford AFC

**Funding Options:** Active Torridge, Bideford AFC. Torridge District Council, Bridge Trust, Bideford, Town Council, \$106

**Community Engagement response**

Site repeatedly identified during community engagement work. Lack of local all-weather facilities

**Concerns:** Is there room on this site without displacing rugby? Site permissions (KGV Playing Fields Trust?)

**Identified sports:** Football

**Design:** 3G / parent shelters

**Narrative:** This site was repeatedly identified during our community engagement work

**Priority Groups:** Girls and women's football, LSEG area.



**Site:** Bowden Green

**What3Words:** /// salt.path.edits



**Partnership / Management:** Unsure at this stage

**Funding Options:** Torridge District Council, Bridge Trust, Bideford Town Council

**Community Engagement response:**

Lack of local all-weather facilities

**Concerns:** Lack of parking facilities. Land owned by Westward Housing. Do they plan to build? Disused play area.

**Identified sports:** Football

**Design:** 3G

**Narrative:** Potentially taking away a green space which doesn't have much access to local green spaces. Proximity to residential properties.

**Priority Groups:** Girls and women's football, LSEG area.

**Site:** College Park

**What3Words:** ///pints.line.intro



**Partnership / Management:** Active Torridge / Bideford AFC / Winsford Trust

**Funding Options:** Torridge District Council? Bridge Trust, Bideford, Town Council

**Community Engagement Response:**

Lack of local all-weather facilities

**Concerns:** Strongly opposed by some local residents. Apparent resident distrust of authorities. Lack of parking, ASB, noise all of concern to residents.

Identified sports: Football

**Design:** 3G

**Narrative:** Space originally intended for a sports centre.

**Priority Groups:** Girls and women's football



**Site:** Torridge Leisure Centre

**What3Words:** demand.comet.corn



**Partnership / Management:** Active Torridge

**Funding Options:** Active Torridge, S106

**Community Engagement Response:**

Would be well used by Northam football teams however, it hasn't been raised as a priority need in our community engagement work so far. Strong support from councillor

**Concerns:** Although the area is marked out as a small grass pitch it is currently well used by dog walkers. Contentious issue between residents and football coaches. Dogs mess on pitches etc.

**Identified sports:** Football, multi-sports (due to proximity to leisure centre)

**Design:** 3G

**Site: Holsworthy - Stanhope Park**

**what3words:** ///assembles.rocks.tinned



**Partnership / Management:** HASP (Holsworthy Area Sports Pavilion)

**Funding options:** £52,000 committed by Holsworthy Town Council

**Community Engagement response**

Largely positive reception, plans already underway for a similar facility.

**Concerns:** Environmental, hedgerow

**Identified sports:** Football, Netball, multi-sports

**Design:** 3G

**Narrative:** Good location, accessible to the town, in a park which is used for a range of activities. A Playzone would be a good fit. Strong support from community, HASP have an existing MUGA project they were working on which they will alter to fit with PZ plans, and £50k earmarked for this. Extensive community engagement work, including with adjacent residential area which could see increase traffic / parking demands. Very strong support from community. The netball club has three teams and are looking to start a youth section, Question over closed or open facility, or a combination. Links with Youth Centre which is quite oversubscribed with 90 kids weekly. Suggestion that there is not much else to do in Holsworthy so new facility would be very well used.

**Priority Groups:** Pockets of rural deprivation, isolated communities. Potential to set up disability groups with activation funding – something which is currently not available.



**Site:** Tennis Court @ Torrington Football Club

**What3 words:** ///possible.suspect.eliminate



**Partnership / Management:** Torrington Football Club / Active Torridge

**Funding:** Torrington Football Club / Active Torridge / S106

**Community Engagement response:**

Lack of suitable facilities, Football club are very keen to develop this site as it is adjacent to their pitch and clubhouse.

**Concerns:** Proximity of residential properties. Parking limited. Number of users – more evidence needed.

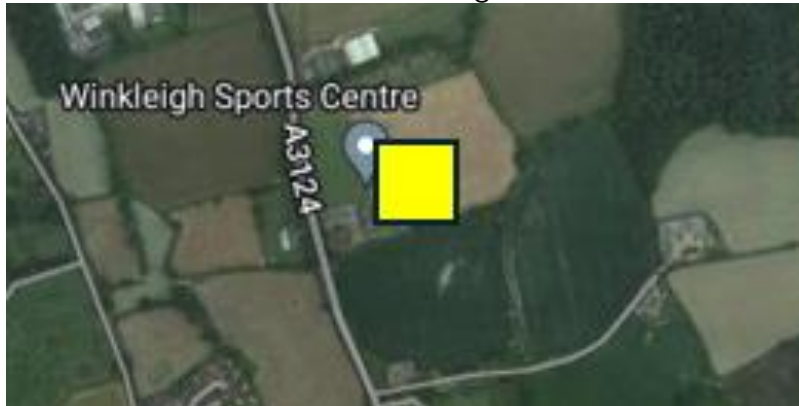
**Identified sports:** Football

**Design:** 3G

**Narrative:** Torrington Football Club have relatively small number of teams. There is another FC in the town (Torridgeside) which are larger and located a mile away. This is an ideal site which is a run down sporting area which has fallen into disuse.

**Site:** Winkleigh Sports Centre

**What3Words:** ///sardine.fuses.diverged



**Partnership / Management:** Winkleigh Sports Centre

**Funding:** \$106

**Community Engagement Response:**

Strong partnership potential, lack of local facilities, very rural, the community travel to other towns for facilities. Well-managed facility. Rapidly growing village with over 300 new builds. More local community engagement needed to widen the user base. Very strong local support and commitment to use by local clubs and groups.

**Concerns:** Timescales around \$106 funding.

Identified sports: Football, short tennis, multi-sports, netball?

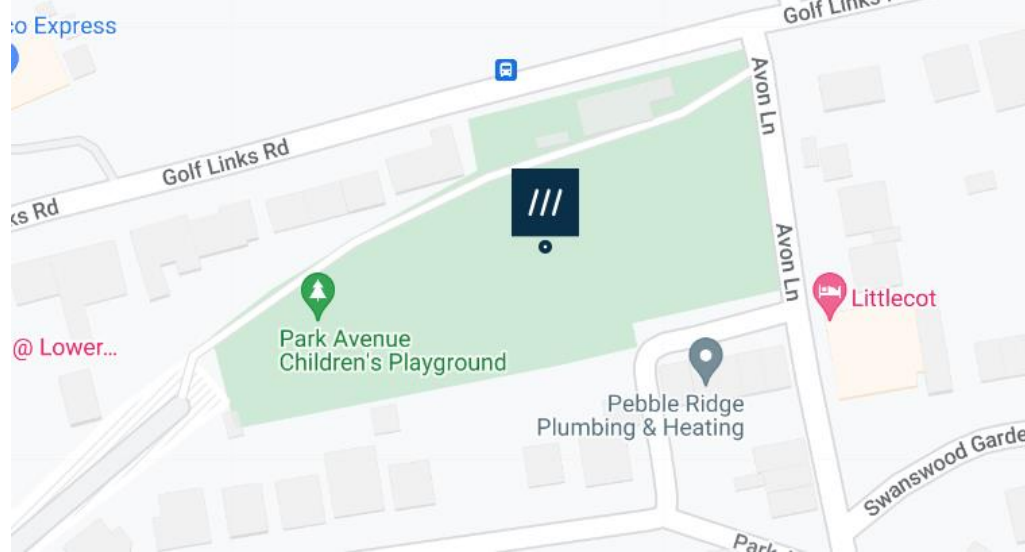
**Design:** 2G / 3G

**Narrative:** Football club would make use of the facility. Developing Youth / girls football. A strong site for a Playzone, adjacent to existing sports club pavilion with changing, kitchen and amenities etc. Activation funding required to engage wider community usage.

**Priority Groups:** Pockets of rural deprivation.

**Site:** Westward Ho!

**What3Words:** ///grading.listings.hubcaps



**Partnership / Management:** Friends of Westward Ho! Park

**Funding Options:** unknown, \$106

**Community Engagement Response:**

Not identified as a priority place in our community engagement work so far – more community engagement needed at this site.

**Concerns:**

**Identified sports:** Multi-sports, short tennis

**Design:** TBC

**Narrative:** Site recommended by Friends of Westward Ho! Park – local community organisation. Westward Ho! demographic is older people, high number of holiday homes / flats. Unsure about current demand for a Playzone.

## Playzone recommendations

Based on the Community Engagement we propose the following for each site:

| SITE                        | PROS   | CONS  | NOTES  | RECOMMENDATION |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|----------------|
| Polyfields                  | Strong public support, available land.   |   | New Playzone   | Yes            |
| Alverdiscott Rd             | Cost effective, potential school use   | Public prefer Polyfields option   | Refurb   | No             |
| Holsworthy                  | Funding in place, strong community backing, genuine multi sport site. Strong local council support, community association in place for future management |   | New facility   | Yes            |
| King George V/cattle market | Strong public support  | Possible impingement on public green space, who would manage this? Public/private | Exact location not confirmed. New facility   | Yes            |
| Torrington                  | Good site, next to football club   | Not overwhelming support from public  | Possible need for more engagement. New facility                                      | Yes            |
| Winkleigh                   | Location, support and possible funding positive,   |   | Would serve new development well. Growing but isolated town a distance from existing | Yes            |



|              |  |   |  |     |
|--------------|--|---|--|-----|
|              |  |   | facilities. New facility               |     |
| Bowden Green | Ambivalent public response, strong for Bideford generally                                      | No parking, toilets, difficult access.                        |  | No  |
| College Park | Good space, some support, site too sensitive   | Mixed response, some strong objections                        | There are better locations             | No  |
| Northam      | Deprived area, strong for women and girls, links to good existing facilities ie Leisure Centre | May interfere with dog walkers, would expect some opposition. | New facility                           | Yes |
| Westward Ho! | Council keen   | Limited space, PZ may not fit                                 | New facility or refurb of tennis court | Yes |