

# Our Sports Field Network Plan for Ōtautahi Christchurch 2024



Whiria ngā whenu  
o ngā papa, honoa ki  
te maurua tāukiuki

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**Bind together the strands of  
each mat and join together  
with the seams of respect  
and reciprocity**

Our partnership with Ngāi Tahu rūnanga is a special relationship that prioritises high-level involvement and influence of tāngata whenua at the earliest stages of planning, to address cultural issues and achieve meaningful outcomes that affirm connections between Ngāi Tahu culture, identity and place in our urban environment as summed up by the whakataukī above.

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**In managing our open spaces we are guided by the Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan, 2013, developed by our six Ngāi Tahu Papatipu Rūnanga - Ngāi Tūāhuriri Rūnanga, Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke (Rāpaki), Te Rūnanga o Koukourārata, Ōnuku Rūnanga, Wairewa Rūnanga, and Te Taumutu Rūnanga.**

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This ensures the cultural needs and aspirations of tāngata whenua – our Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners – are properly recognised in all aspects of urban development, including open spaces used for sport and recreation.

# Sports fields – enabling sport to strengthen our communities

Sports fields improve our health and wellbeing. They strengthen our communities by building social connectivity and inclusion, and by supporting diversity.

Sports fields are an integral component of our city’s open space and contribute to ‘greening’ our urban environment. They enable a wide range of sport and recreation opportunities that are central to enhancing community health and wellbeing.

Our Sports Field Network Plan sets out how – over 10 years – we will plan sports fields to meet the sporting needs of our community for all levels of sport and for all age groups. It will also help to ensure that the needs of our community are met in the face of pressure for the city’s open space to be used for a range of recreation needs, to create a healthy environment, for tree planting to grow the city’s urban forest and to help meet the challenge of climate change.

Our plan will sit alongside other Council plans that help contribute to the delivery of Council’s community outcomes. It will identify the key directions, priorities and actions that will be implemented to develop a network of sports fields to help strengthen our communities.

## Why sports fields are important

Sporting activity is at the heart of every community. It impacts our culture, society and economy. An accessible and affordable network of sports fields provides opportunity for our citizens to participate in and enjoy sport regardless of age, ability, background, ethnicity or gender.

Whilst it is widely accepted that regular physical activity helps prevent a range of health conditions, the benefits of sport extend beyond just health. Not only does playing sport have a positive impact on academic performance, it also improves mental health and wellbeing. Communities are also strengthened when we come together to play sport, building a sense of belonging which grows our community and city identity. From players to family to volunteers, sport brings people together, improving social connectivity and inclusion, and supporting diversity through creation of social networks.



# The plan in a nutshell

The Sports Field Network Plan focuses on the provision, development and performance of a network of well-placed, appropriately developed and accessible sports fields across our city, balanced against other competing needs for use of our city's parks.

The plan sets out how we aim to provide a sports field network that encourages citizens to participate in sport locally, and enjoy the multiple benefits of good health, wellbeing and strengthened communities.

The plan needs to consider the different seasonal needs of sports. The predominant users of the land allocated in winter are rugby, league and football codes. In summer, the predominate users of sports parks are cricket, softball and touch rugby. Junior sports across codes often utilise senior fields for their games. Touch rugby uses a high number of fields as it is a high participation sport.

The plan guides development and improvement of our sports fields: to address any backlog; to meet the growth and changing use demands of our communities; and to facilitate sporting performance.

The scope of the plan covers the land that Council has historically provided to regional sports organisations (RSOs) for sports traditionally played on natural turf and which the RSOs have then allocated seasonally to their user groups. It also covers land that could be acquired in the future.

## Vision and guiding principles

Our vision: **Parks are for everyone.**

Organised sport is integrated with other legitimate parks use and functions including recreation, community events and activities and delivery of environmental outcomes. Together these form a foundation for sports park and open space provision that is multi-faceted, flexible, inclusive, equitable and sustainable.

By upholding these principles:

- **For everyone** – accessibility is delivered locally for our juniors, supporting participation in sport whilst minimising barriers such as travel and cost.
- **Development is optimised and equitable** – local provision is supplemented by quality, well-placed and appropriately configured community facilities that support sport development and performance and build the city's sporting image.
- **Environmental responsibility** – the environmental impact of sports fields in terms of resource demand, chemical use, noise, traffic and light spill are minimised or contained and the greenspace benefits of our sports fields are maximised.

## Goals

The Sports Field Network Plan has three goals

- **Play where you live** – Citizens can engage in sport (especially junior sport) where they live (Goal 1).
- **Participate for life** – Sports field infrastructure supports full and flexible participation in community sport (Goal 2).
- **Succeed** – Sports field quality enables high level community sport (Goal 3).

Provision and development of our sports field network must balance the other recreational needs of our community, and competing and increasing demands for use of open space.

## Actions and progress

A high level Action Plan (Appendix 2) will drive investment and progress towards achieving the goals. As we work towards this, we need to monitor and report on the status of the sports field network and the wider benefits to the city and our communities.

The Action Plan requires the commitment of the whole of Council and the community to reach the provision, development and performance targets we want for our city.



# Setting the scene – the value of play, active recreation and sport

Provision of play, active recreation and sports facilities, infrastructure, resources and opportunities are important to a large proportion of the population.

## In 2022, Sport NZ found that:

- 73% of the adult population and 92% of young people (aged 5–17 years) participated each week in play, active recreation and sport.
- 79% of adults and 63% of young people would like to have been more involved in play, active recreation and sport.
- High deprivation, Asian and Pasifika population groups were significantly less likely to participate.

Research into New Zealand’s beliefs around the value of sport and active recreation in 2017<sup>2</sup> found a broad base of support for sport and active recreation and a belief in its value to New Zealand and New Zealanders. The value of sport and active recreation is seen to lie in the contributions it makes to individuals, families, communities, and the country as a whole.



## Play, active recreation and sport is a cost-effective investment towards local government wellbeing outcomes.

International and domestic evidence clearly demonstrates that play, sport and active recreation generate significant value for society across multiple wellbeing domains and outcomes, many of which are specifically relevant to the outcomes sought by local government.

- Recently published research from a Social Return on Investment study found that for every \$1 spent on play, active recreation and sport, there is a social return of \$2.12 to New Zealand. This means that for every dollar invested in play, active recreation and sport, the social return is more than doubled. This is a conservative figure and the actual return, especially for those currently missing out on opportunities to be active, is likely to be higher.
- In 2019 participation in play, active recreation and sport generated a \$3.32 billion return in subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction and happiness) within New Zealand.

Play, active recreation and sport can support the four types of wellbeing that are aligned to local government outcomes (social, economic, environmental, and cultural).

- Social wellbeing – play, active recreation and sport have the potential to develop important social skills, strengthen social networks, bring communities together, and curb antisocial behaviours.
- Economic wellbeing – the sport and recreation sector makes significant direct and indirect contributions to the New Zealand economy.
- Environmental wellbeing – provision of green space for play, active recreation and sport, and infrastructure for active transportation, can support the achievement of environmental and community wellbeing outcomes.
- Cultural wellbeing – participation in play, active recreation and sport can strengthen feelings of identity and culture and feelings of belonging within and across cultures.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1313/angus-associates-value-of-sport-final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/u41hdovx/the-value-of-play-active-recreation-and-sport-for-local-government.pdf>



## Acknowledging our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Māori stakeholders have described non-monetised outcomes that are consistent with Māori views of wellbeing, noting dimensions other than physical – that is, spiritual, mental, emotional and cultural health – all within a context of environmental health, with sport having the following cultural outcomes:

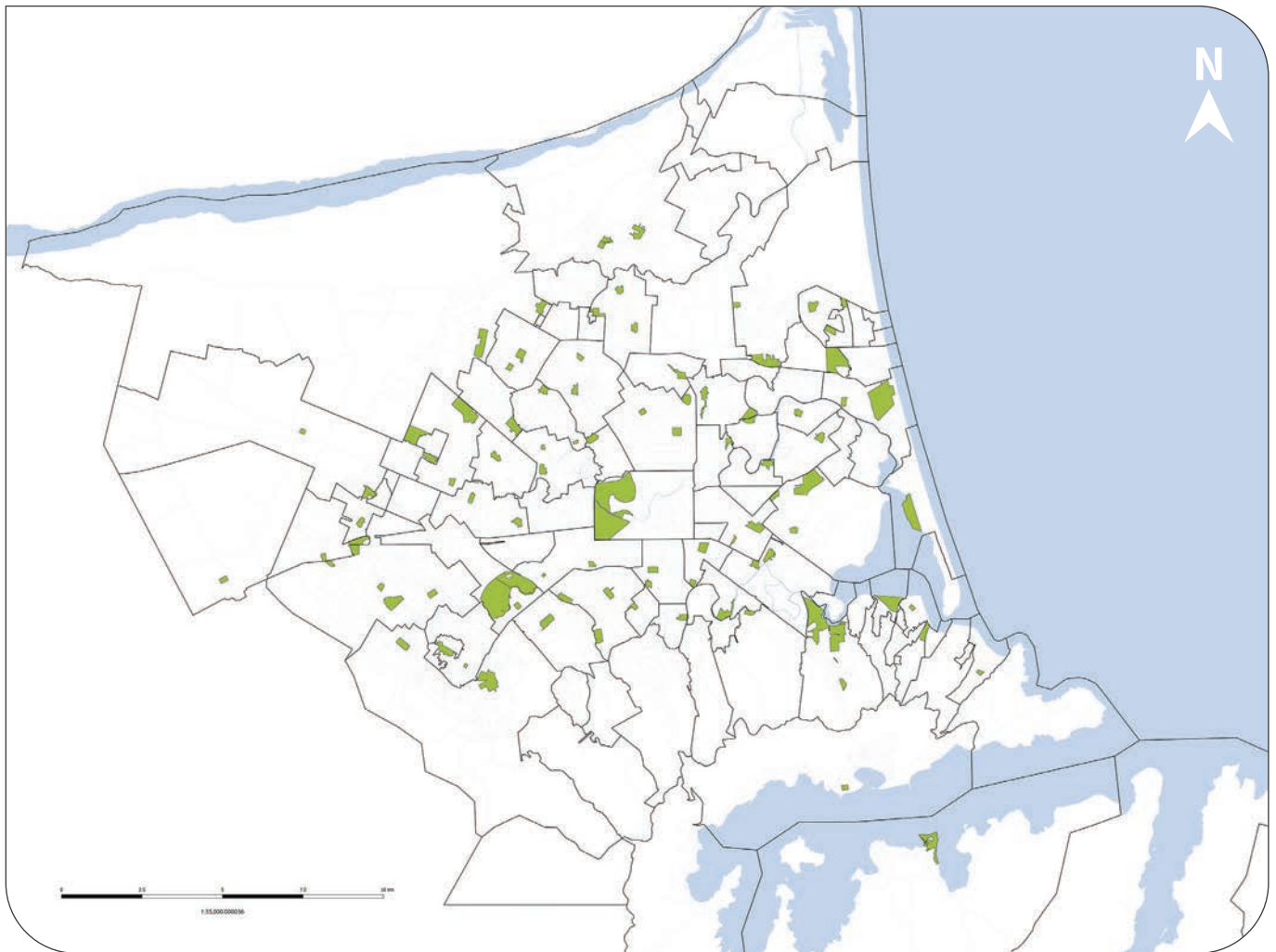
- Intergenerational participation strengthens whānau.
- Reclamation and protection of mātauranga Māori strengthens Indigenous knowledge systems and wellbeing.
- Participation provides opportunities to reinforce and practice tikanga Māori, strengthening ‘a Māori way of life’.
- Whakawhanaungatanga (kinship) ties are strengthened through participation.
- Cultural identity is strengthened through participation in Māori sport and recreation.
- Māori sport and recreation provides opportunities to connect to the whenua ‘as Māori’.
- Rangatahi experience leadership through Māori sport and recreation.
- Māori sport and recreation are an expression of mana Motuhake (self determination).



# Looking across our district

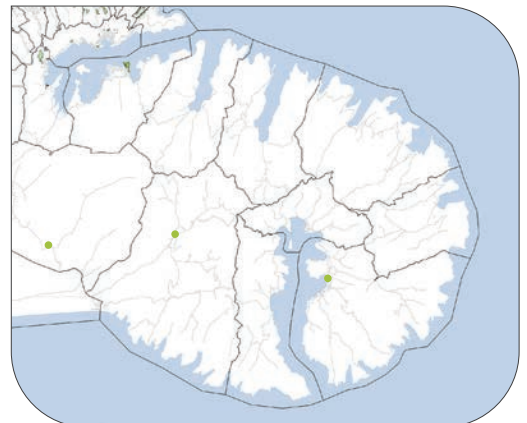
Our sports field network is part of a wider parks and open space network that extends across Ōtautahi Christchurch and Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū Banks Peninsula. It is a vital part of the green infrastructure that supports our built and natural environment – the ‘green lungs’ of the city. How our sports fields are provided should align with RSO catchments (i.e. areas in which clubs exist) and sporting delivery to avoid risk of duplication.

## Distribution of parks with sports fields across the city and Banks Peninsula



### Legend

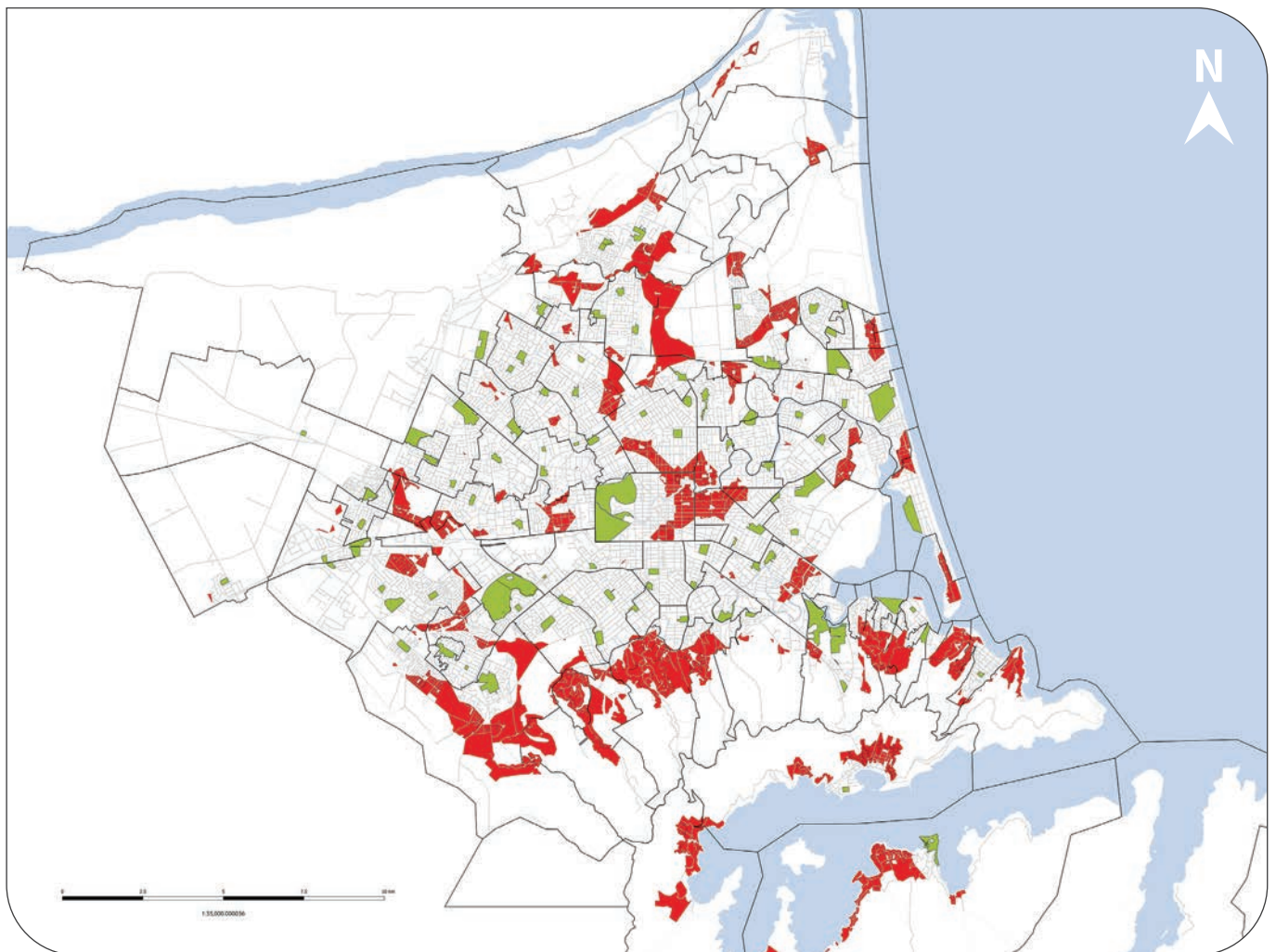
- Street centre line
- Suburb boundary
- Parks with sports fields





A large proportion of the city's residents live more than easy walking distance to a park with a sports field, defined as a distance greater than 1km.

**Distribution of residential and mixed use zone areas more than 1km from a park with a sports field across the city (shown in red)**



**Legend**

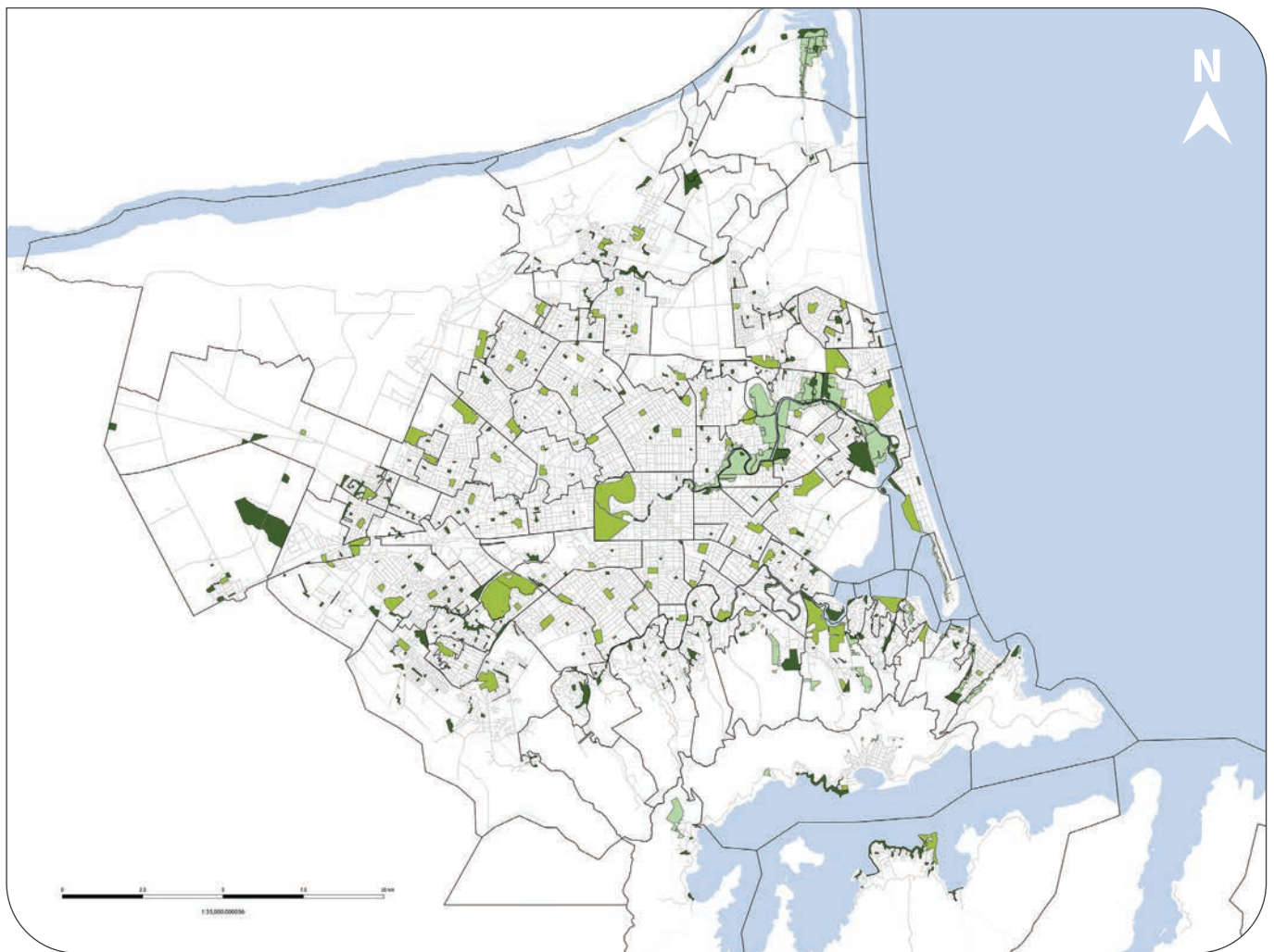
- Street centre line
- Suburb boundary
- Parks with sports fields
- Residential and mixed use zone areas more than 1km from a park with a sports field

## Looking across our district (continued)

However, if the city's wider open space network of community parks greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup>\* is included as part of the network of parks with sports fields, a far greater extent of potential locations for flexible sports field playing spaces, in particular smaller training areas, can be considered.

\*the minimum area considered suitable for locating a junior field or flexible training area

### Distribution of community parks greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup> and parks with sports fields across the city



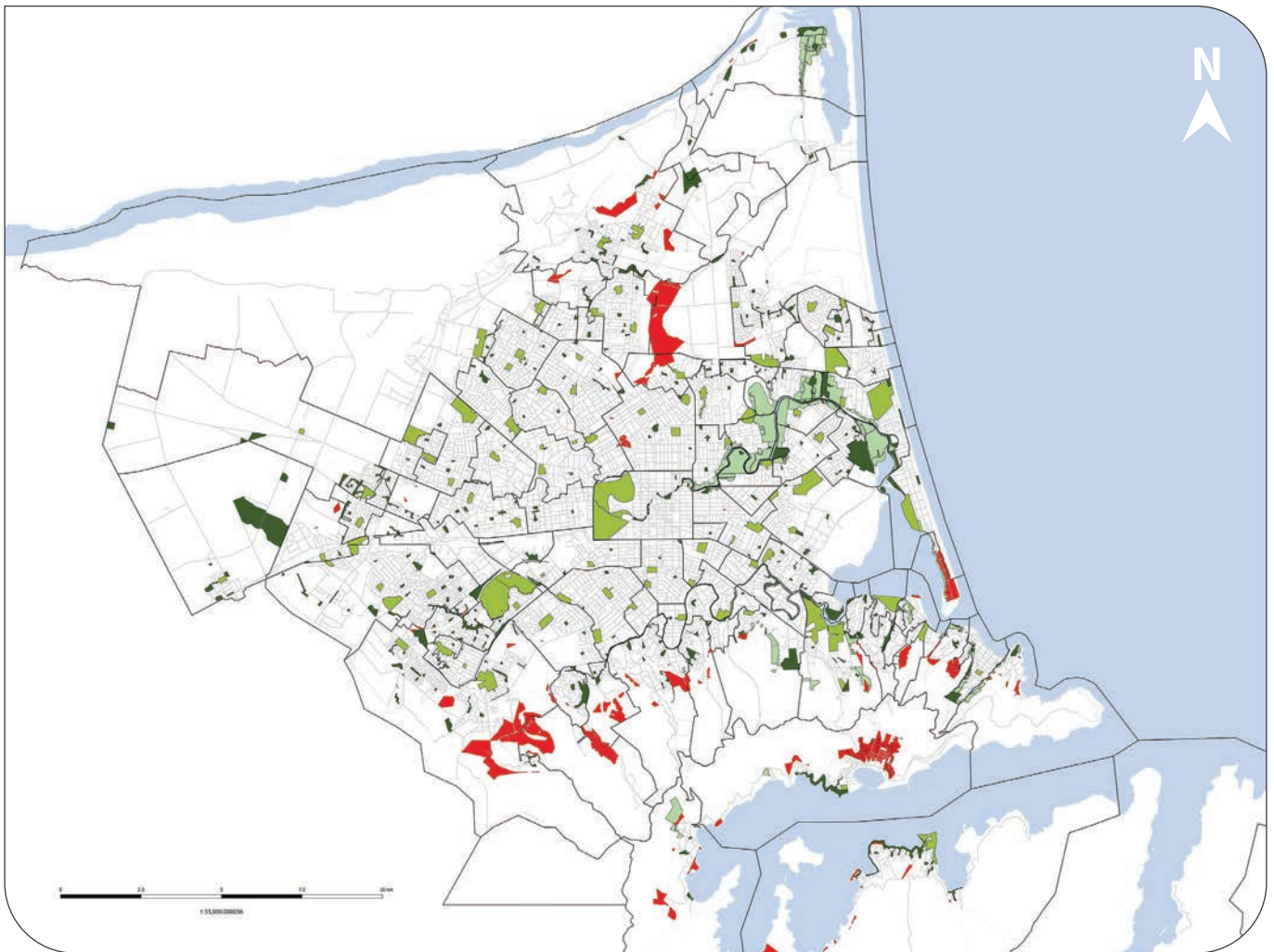
#### Legend

- Street centre line
- Suburb boundary
- Community park greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup>
- Parks with sports fields
- Residential Red Zone



By accommodating the wider open space network of community parks into the sports field network plan, the distribution of areas more than 1km from a sports field playing space across the city can be reduced significantly.

**Distribution of residential and mixed use zone areas more than 1km from a community park greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup> and from a park with a sports field across the city (shown in red)**



**Legend**

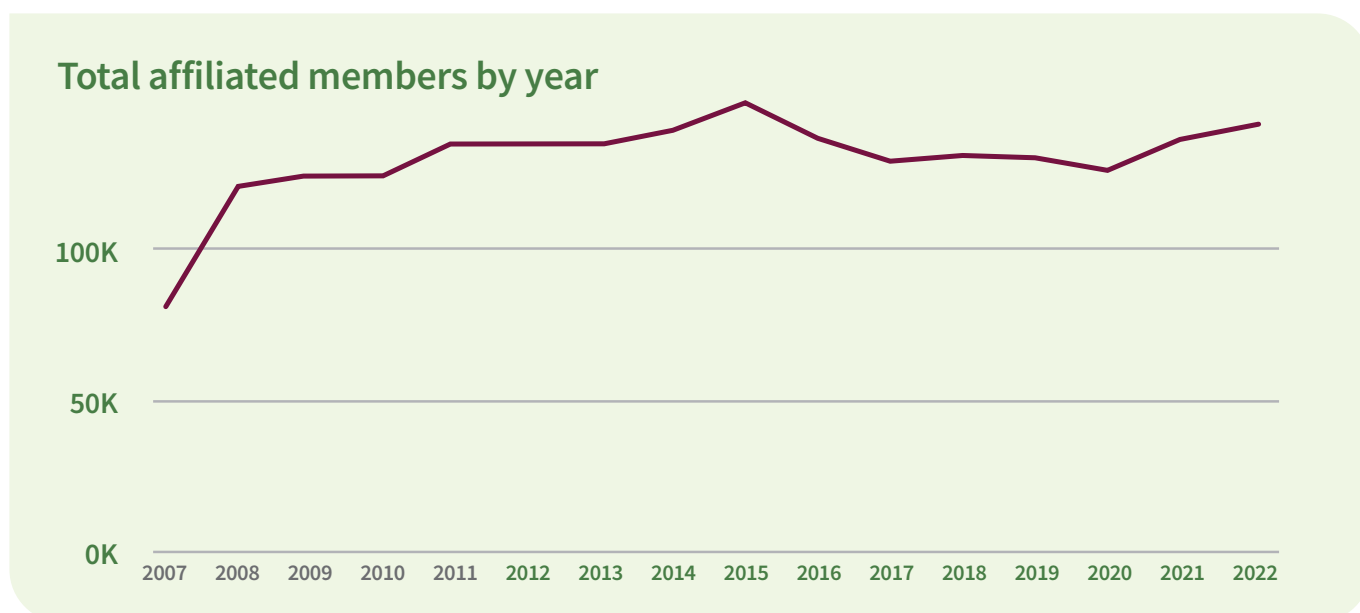
- Street centre line
- Suburb boundary
- Community park greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup>
- Parks with sports fields
- Residential Red Zone
- Residential and mixed use zone areas more than 1km from a community park greater than 3000m<sup>2</sup> and from a park with a sports field

## Participation – Greater Christchurch (Christchurch City, Selwyn and Waimakariri Districts)

Many sports in 2022 reported a growth in participation, with 14 out of 26 sports showing that overall participation numbers had increased.

Across the sector, affiliated membership in 2022 increased by 4272 members (or 3%) to a total of 139,930 members. Of this total, nearly 62,000 members (or approximately 44%) were associated with sports played on natural turf (cricket, football, rugby, rugby league, softball and touch). There was steady growth from 2021, with the sector recovering well from the dip during COVID-19 and with participation now back to pre-earthquake levels.

However, in 2022, COVID-19 continued to be a challenge for sports and sporting communities. The biggest challenge in 2022 was the reduction in volunteers, with over 60% of sports stating they had fewer volunteers. Funding and sponsorship continued to show a decline (less being received), and fewer coaches and officials were also seen as a result of COVID-19. The introduction of compulsory vaccination and different rules led to some codes seeing players leaving the sport and events not being run.



The overall sector numbers hide the fact that individual sports and clubs can experience an ebb and flow in their membership numbers. For example, in 2022 cricket showed an increase in membership of 20%, rugby league an increase of 17% and touch an increase of 11%, while rugby membership reported a small decrease of 5%. Football and softball numbers remained similar to the 2021 figures, although football have already indicated that their winter participation numbers grew by approximately 8.9% in 2023, even before taking into account any benefits seen from increased coverage of the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup.

### Changes in sports membership participation numbers in Greater Christchurch

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Cricket	13,000	10,530	12,320	12,150	14,530
Football	10,980	11,360	11,290	11,990	11,630
Rugby	14,250	15,040	13,670	15,080	15,360
Rugby League	2,960	2,490	2,110	2,670	2,800
Softball	3,230	3,140	3,180	3,250	3,620
Touch	17,300	15,380	15,790	16,580	17,360
<b>Total</b>	<b>61,720</b>	<b>57,940</b>	<b>58,360</b>	<b>61,720</b>	<b>65,300</b>

Source: <https://www.sportcanterbury.org.nz/asset/downloadasset?id=db08f97f-a4bd-4224-a09e-6cddbada79ebf>



Overall, gender balance is holding steady at roughly 40% female to 60% male. There has been a slight increase in female participation since 2021 but it is not at the peak of 42% seen in 2020. In 2022 junior memberships made up the largest proportion of membership at 43%, followed by seniors (26%), then Youth (22%), with the smallest proportion being Masters (9%).

In addition to the total sports affiliated membership of 139,930, Regional Sports Organisations reported that they had an additional 71,000 casual participations in 2022. These participations are still club activated but in a less formal way through shorter playing formats.

Amongst the general feedback from the sports community in 2022, three areas in particular were relevant to sports field provision:

Sport	Topic	Comment
Football	Artificial or dry outdoor spaces	“Our system is already under significant pressure for access to lit facilities. We have members who are simply not able to be physically active during the week as we do not have the facilities to provide them with.”
Rugby	Lighting for night play	“We have a sport contained in winter with the weather and we are not able to provide the game that our participants are telling us they want to play.”
Rugby League	Changing facilities	“We find it very difficult to attract females and female match officials to our game when we are unable to accommodate their needs at Council grounds i.e. changing facilities and toilets.”

Source: <https://www.sportcanterbury.org.nz/asset/downloadasset?id=db08f97f-a4bd-4224-a09e-6cddbda79ebf>

**In summary, given that the Greater Christchurch region has a population of around 500,000 people, and that around 200,000 people are actively or casually involved in sport, clearly playing sport is a core component of citizen’s life in the city.**



## Provision – Christchurch

Christchurch has a total of 115 sports parks totalling approximately 1300ha of open space. Approximately 50% of the sports park area is developed into sports fields.

Ward	Area (ha)	No. of sports parks
Banks Peninsula	16	5
Burwood	105	7
Cashmere	9	3
Central	166	4
Coastal	157	10
Fendalton	26	4
Halswell	214	9
Harewood	44	6
Heathcote	65	10
Hornby	156	15
Innes	71	10
Linwood	91	10
Papanui	27	7
Riccarton	10	3
Spreydon	41	6
Waimairi	69	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,297</b>	<b>115</b>

Two wards in particular stand out as being poorly serviced with a lack of quality green playing space: Cashmere and Riccarton. There is also pressure on other wards.

### Other provision

An unquantified number of school and privately owned sports fields contribute to the wider network and their availability influences demand for Council parks. When these sports fields are unavailable, sold or redeveloped for other uses, sports users will often turn to Council for provision. These sports fields also provide an opportunity to improve Council’s geographical provision or add capacity when Council sports fields are unavailable (e.g. redevelopment).

Note that the Regional Sports Organisations for cricket and rugby cannot currently deliver their seasonal competitions without accessing non-Council sports fields.





## Sports field allocation process

Christchurch City Council allocates sports fields for seasonal sports use to the Regional Sports Organisations, on behalf of clubs, to enable the delivery of community sport. The allocations are made by the Council twice yearly prior to the commencement of the summer and winter sports seasons. In addition to the sports fields, the allocation also includes supporting sports infrastructure, such as changing rooms and toilets, for the days and times that the sports fields are allocated. Our Non-Exclusive User Agreement sets out the terms and conditions for access to the sports fields throughout the city.

The nature of the Non-Exclusive User Agreement acknowledges that the rights granted to the regional sports organisations are for the days and times that they have requested on behalf of the clubs and that outside of those days and times, the parks are available for wider community recreation.

	Participation numbers (2022)	No. of fields allocated
Cricket	13,000	87*
Football	10,980	197
Rugby	14,250	116*
Rugby League	2,960	44
Softball	3,230	80
Touch	17,300	130
* these figures do not take into account the large number of sports fields currently used by cricket and rugby within the school network.		

## Sports ground closures

During the winter period between 9 June 2023 and 28 August 2023, all Christchurch City Council sports fields were closed on 21 days for training and on six days, or three weekends, for games. This amount of closure during that period represents over 30% of available playing days.

These closures impact the ability of RSOs to deliver their full season programme, they disrupt draws and, when at the end of the season, impact final playoffs. However, the greatest impact of closures is on training (80% of closures in 2023 affected training).

According to NIWA, winter rainfall in Christchurch is showing a trend of a likely or very likely increase ([www.stats.govt.nz/indicators/rainfall/](http://www.stats.govt.nz/indicators/rainfall/)). Furthermore, Christchurch also shows a trend of an increase in the annual maximum one-day rainfall. We should expect to see similar closure statistics continuing.

Winter 2023 closures	Training	Games	No. of days
9–10 June		✓	2
19–22 June	✓		4
8–9 July		✓	2
10–13 July	✓		4
24–28 July	✓		5
29–30 July		✓	2
10–11 August	✓		2
17 August	✓		1
24–28 August	✓		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27*</b>

Field closures for the 2023 winter = 21 training days and 6 playing days (3 weekends)

\*equivalent to a closure rate of 30% over the period 9 June to 28 August 2023

Source: Parks Operations – Hybris/SAP system

## Sports field floodlighting

The appropriate provision of supporting infrastructure, such as sports field floodlighting, is an essential requirement for maximising sports field use and developing player skills.

A total of 53 sports parks have floodlit sports fields for winter use:

- Rugby Union – 17 parks
- Football – 25 parks
- Rugby League – 11 parks

Sporting clubs own and manage floodlights at 50 sports parks (94%). The Council own the remainder at English Park, South Hagley Park, Hansen Park, QEII and Ngā Puna Wai.

Positioning floodlights so they do not interfere with seasonal layout of sports fields and maintenance can be limiting. Many clubs are reliant on volunteers and find the process of fundraising, consenting, constructing, operating and maintaining floodlights challenging. Once established, the capital investment involved makes it difficult for clubs to relocate and tends to limit use of the lights to the club that owns them, inhibiting flexible use of the sports park.

Sports fields with floodlights are often over-used and have reduced maintenance and renovation windows due to limited availability of alternative training venues. Typically, this drives up operational costs to repair the fields for seasonal transition.

## Sports field condition

A 2022 independent desktop analysis of sports field condition at 33 sports parks assessed drainage performance, surface levels and turfgrass surface quality.

Of the 33 parks assessed we estimated that three parks (9%) were of high quality, 11 parks (30%) were of above average quality, two parks (2%) were of average quality, 15 parks (46%) were of below average quality and two parks (6%) were of very low quality.

Current funding levels for the renewal or upgrade of sports fields, including irrigation systems, is typically in the region of \$1.5M–\$2M per year. This level of funding allows work to be carried out on two or three fields per year but is insufficient to bring all fields up to an average quality or above. Therefore, renewals and upgrades must be strategically prioritised within the resources available, and under performing fields potentially re-purposed. A regular and robust condition assessment programme is needed, along with a means of prioritising sports field renewal and development on an equitable basis as a means of improving our asset information to drive effective investment decisions. Quality issues are likely to continue unless funding levels are significantly increased.







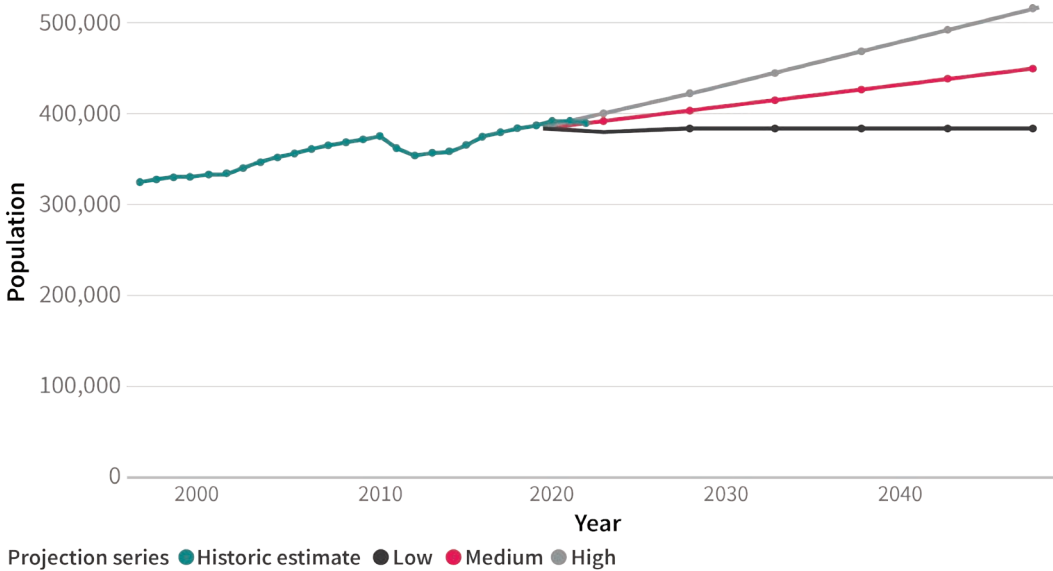
## Demographics

This section provides a summary of the key population patterns for Christchurch City and an overview of any impacts these may have on provision and use of sports fields. Figures have been taken from data provided by Christchurch City Council unless otherwise indicated.

### Population growth

Christchurch City's most recent population estimate was 396,200, in June 2023. Projections indicate that by 2033 the population is likely to be around 414,000 (increase of 24,700 or 6.5% growth) under a medium-growth scenario. However, it could range anywhere between 384,000 (decrease of 5,300 or <1% decline) and 445,000 (increase of 55,700 or 14.2% growth).

These scenarios suggest that population growth will not be a significant driver of sports field provision and use in the next 10 years.



Source: <https://ccc.govt.nz/culture-and-community/statistics-and-facts/facts-stats-and-figures>



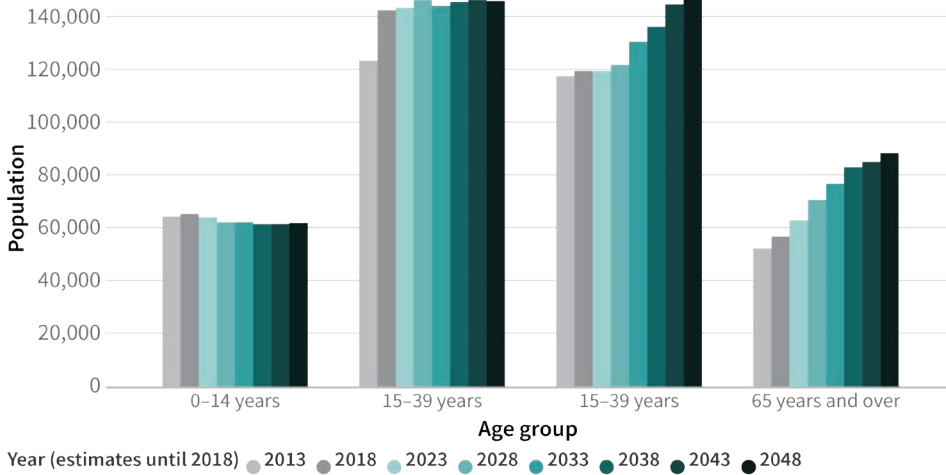
**Population distribution**

The number of people aged 65 years and over is expected to increase by approximately 56% between 2018 and 2048 (from 56,600 to 88,300). As a proportion of the city’s population, this age group is projected to increase from 15% to 20%.

The number of people aged under 15 years is expected to decrease slightly between 2018 and 2048, falling from 65,100 to 61,700. As a proportion of the city’s population, this age group is projected to decrease from 17% to 14%.

The projected trend of a declining under 15 years age group (junior sport) is further evidence that population growth will not be a significant driver of sports field provision and use in the next 10 years. Demand is more likely to be driven by an increase in women, girls, ethnic communities and an aging population becoming more active.

Walking sports options for people of all ages are ensuring they can continue to remain active in sport for life. This option is particularly relevant to football and hockey and could have a direct impact on artificial football and hockey turf provision in the future.

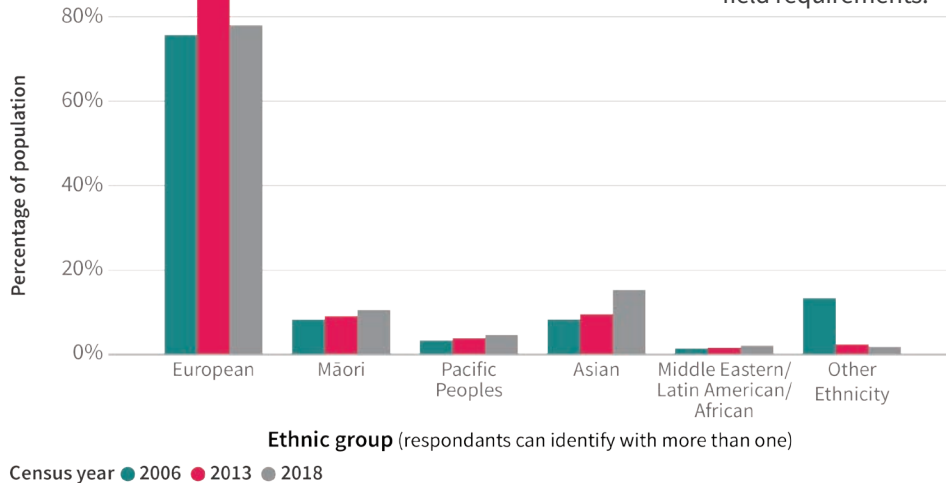


Source: <https://ccc.govt.nz/culture-and-community/statistics-and-facts/facts-stats-and-figures>

**Cultural diversity**

The most common ethnicities in the city that people identified with were European (78%), Asian (15%), Māori (10%), Pacific Peoples (3.8%), and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (1.5 %).

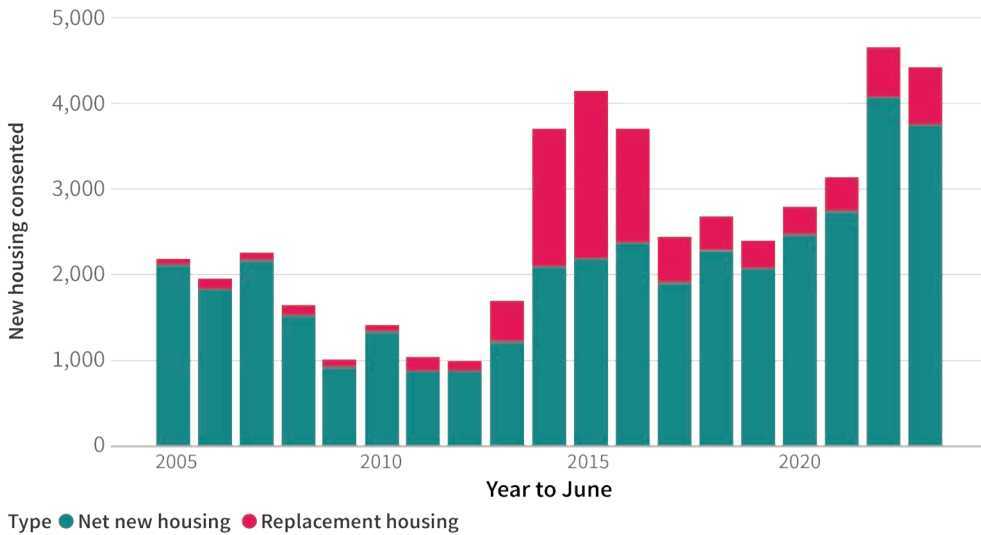
The ethnicity of Christchurch is changing as more people are coming to Christchurch from non-European countries. Asian, Māori and Pacific Peoples populations are the main contributors to this change. It is expected that an increasingly diverse population will expect a wider range of sporting activities that will in turn inform changing sports field requirements.



Source: <https://ccc.govt.nz/culture-and-community/statistics-and-facts/facts-stats-and-figures>

## Housing development

Building consents were issued for 4420 new dwellings and units for the year ending June 2023. Of these, 3740 (85%) were for additional dwellings and units to the city’s housing stock (net new housing). Projections suggest the total number of households will likely increase to around 167,200 by 2033 (medium series), and 176,400 households by 2043.



Source: <https://ccc.govt.nz/culture-and-community/statistics-and-facts/facts-stats-and-figures>

Most of the housing growth is in the southwest and north areas of the city, particularly around Halswell and Belfast. The areas of Prestons and Yaldhurst have also experienced significant increases. This growth was anticipated, and the 2009 South-West Christchurch Area Plan and 2010 Belfast Area Plan provide a framework within the Urban Development Strategy for managing urban and business growth during the next 35 years.

In the next 30 years at least 35,000 new houses are predicted to be required in Christchurch City. There is a trend towards increased demand for small houses, accessible houses for the elderly and higher density developments (focusing on building upwards rather than outwards with increasing pressure on Christchurch Central, as well as surrounding suburbs St Albans, Edgware, Spreydon, Papanui, Riccarton and Waltham).

The Council is required to implement the National Policy Statement on Urban Development to enable more development to happen at different heights, with the highest development enabled in the central city and suburban commercial centres. This will provide for more people to live near existing services, public transport networks and infrastructure and to ensure future growth meets the needs of our communities.

Our challenge is to manage open space, including the existing sports field network, so that the environmental benefits and the sporting opportunities valued by the communities are protected whilst accommodating the city’s growth.

We are going to have to look at the way we use our existing sports field network and travel to use it, and how we acquire new land in greenfield and housing development areas so that communities have equitable access to the sports field network.



# What we need to do

## Taking a strategic view

The Sports Field Network Plan forms part of wider city planning for how we make use of land and provide infrastructure to live, do business, move around, enjoy the outdoors and respect mana whenua values for whenua and wai. How, what and where we plan affects individual and community wellbeing, and the city's resilience to the impacts of climate change.

This plan underpins the Council's Strategic Priorities of:

- reducing emissions as a Council and as a city, and investing in adaptation and resilience, leading a city-wide response to climate change while protecting our indigenous biodiversity, water bodies and tree canopy
- being an inclusive and equitable city that puts people at the centre of developing our city and district, prioritising wellbeing, accessibility and connection

It supports our key Community Outcomes of being:

- a collaborative confident city
- a green liveable city
- a cultural powerhouse city
- a thriving prosperous city

The principles and policies set out in the Ngāi Tahu Mahaanui Iwi Management Plan 2013 are reflected in the plan's actions and objectives.

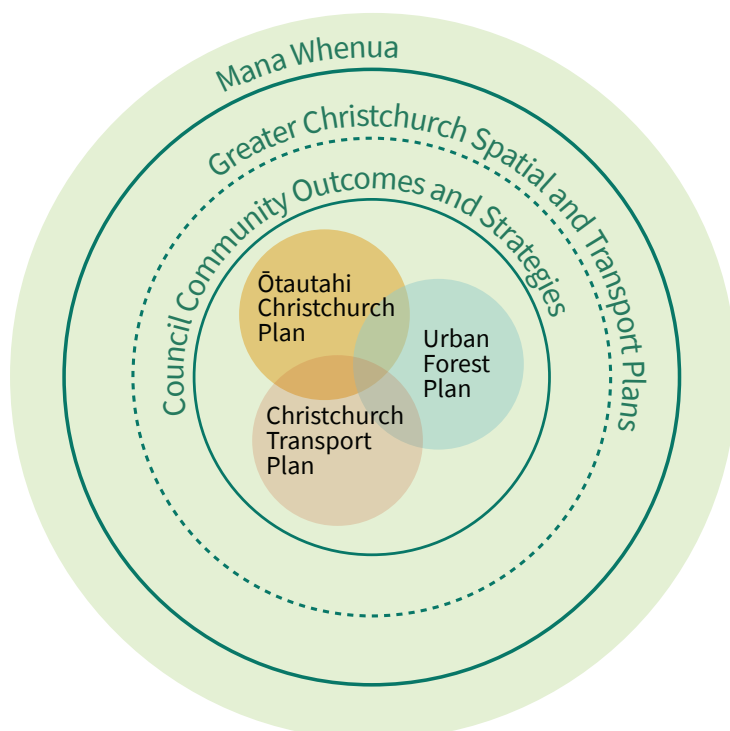
The plan contributes to Council's Strengthening Communities Together Strategy (2022-2032). The equitable provision of safe and accessible sports fields is an important contributor to building strong, successful and resilient communities in which our residents can contribute to an active society, for example by volunteering in the organisation of sports delivery.

Also, there is a close alignment with key Council and sub-regional plans already completed or underway, including:

- The Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan, the Mass Rapid Transit Indicative Business Case and the Urban Forest Plan
- Kia tūroa te Ao Ōtautahi Christchurch Climate Resilience Strategy
- Te Haumako Te Whitingia Strengthening Communities Together Strategy
- Property Strategy (in early development)
- Physical Recreation and Sport Strategy

Each of the above plans will interact with the proposed approach to sports field network planning.

Actions in the Sports Field Network Plan will inform business cases and investment planning for Council work programmes and projects through annual and long term planning processes.







# Issues we need to consider

## Housing intensification

A growing population in existing urban areas as a result of higher volumes of infill housing is increasing the need for access to parks and open spaces. In turn, under such intensification, parks, open spaces and urban forestry take on an increasingly important flood mitigation role.

## Changes to urban form

Changes to urban form are anticipated through the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan and proposed Mass Rapid Transit. These initiatives will support Christchurch to lower its emissions and underpin a strengthened network of urban and town centres. Over time this will see a growing population within significant urban centres leading to increased demand for sports fields in these areas.

## Increasing demand for park use

Increasing demand for park use associated with a range of park values and functions is an important factor impacting sports field provision and development.

Winter sports fields are typically used for approximately 15% of any given week (daylight hours), leaving 85% of the potential available time available for use and enjoyment of the park by other members of the community. Moving forward there is a need for sports fields to be considered through a wider open space lens and as part of an integrated green space solution for both the local community and the city.

## Changing sports field use

Overall participant numbers in organised sport as it is currently played may not grow significantly in the next 30 years. However, an ageing population, changing population ethnicity and growing participation of women in sport is changing the nature of community engagement in sport and the types of sport being played. This in turn may result in some sports fields being re-purposed if demand for some sports declines.

The 'greenfield' growth areas of Christchurch with increasing numbers in the sport participation age range are concentrated in the northwest and southwest suburbs of the city.

Multiple codes and new sports (e.g. ultimate frisbee) are competing for use of existing sports fields and particularly in sports parks with higher quality playing surfaces and ancillary facilities such as floodlighting.

Growing demand for equity (emerging, cultural, walking and minor sports) needs to consider geographical distribution and community accessibility whilst balancing provision across sports and grades of play relative to participant numbers. Changing sports field use demands are also being driven by an increasing reluctance of participants to commit to traditional weekly sporting competitions; an increased demand for non-weekend, evening and casual sports field use; the emergence of shortened versions of sports across codes; event-based participation to meet changing lifestyle demands; and competing recreation activities. Longer and overlapping seasons and increased demand for year-round, shoulder and off-season use is also shaping how we provide, develop and maintain our sports fields.

Currently, the capacity to meet these needs is hindered by historical code use, club-owned facilities (e.g. floodlights), and both regional sporting organisation and club expectations. The availability of sufficient all-weather, floodlit surfaces to facilitate flexible and concentrated use is an issue that is widely held and of high importance to our sporting community. Flexibility of use is key.

In the case of cricket, the expense of providing high level grass wicket blocks may drive some investment towards artificial cricket wickets.

## Climate change induced hazards

The Sports Field Network Plan can support us to take a strategic approach to investment in response to climate change.

Christchurch will be increasingly exposed to climate change induced hazards including sea level rise, rainfall and floods, heat, drought and fire, extreme weather, soil erosion and landslides. Further information on these hazards is set out in the **District Climate Change Risk Screening**. These hazards will change the suitability of some sites for use as sports fields. A range of options to respond to these hazards will need to be considered including adapting or relocate facilities or managing demand. At the same time, sports fields can support climate resilience by increasing drainage and attenuation (storage) capacity in severe weather events, helping to protect our communities from harm.

## Demand for all-weather training and play

The quality and use of sports fields is coupled with an increased demand for surfaces that support ‘all-weather’ use (e.g. improved drainage, artificial surfaces) and have associated floodlight infrastructure to extend the available hours of use.

### Sports field quality

Poor sports field quality is typically associated with winter sports fields having poor drainage and being damaged when used in wet weather. This restricts hours of use for both training and play and increases sports field closures during wet winters.

A knock-on effect of this is the delay in fields being able to be prepared for summer sport because they are too wet to operate maintenance machinery.

Ground closures also adversely impact the ability for teams to train under floodlights during periods of significant wet weather.

### Artificial turf

There is an increasing call from some sports codes (specifically football and rugby) for artificial turfs. While they are more expensive than grass sports fields to build, they enable all-weather use, provide a consistent quality playing surface, support high use capacity during peak demand periods (e.g. training) and year-round use (with no seasonal renovation periods) and can be used by multiple sporting codes.

The intensive use typically associated with these facilities can negatively affect neighbouring properties (e.g. noise, light spill, traffic, parking). Therefore, it is important to build these facilities in existing parks (of appropriate size and configuration) that are located in non or low-residential areas, or to purchase land in commercial or industrial areas.

There is an opportunity to establish a number of area-based ‘nodal’ artificial turfs across the city. Maximising the use of artificial turf is a consideration so in some cases location either within or close by schools will ensure optimal use. Location near the proposed Mass Rapid Transit Network and key cycle routes can also help drive down emissions and support equitable access. Partnership development opportunities with schools and the regional council could provide advantages both to Council and education providers through shared development and operational costs.

### Floodlights

A significant issue reported by sports organisations is the lack of good quality floodlit sports fields for training and night games. Although 53 Council sports parks have floodlit sports fields, most sports field lighting systems are suitable only for training and very few lighting systems cover a full field. There is strong evidence that training demand exceeds current supply, driven by changing needs for participation including weekday night-time sport. Furthermore, a very small percentage of the sports field lighting systems are of adequate quality to enable night games, thus reducing the sports ability to change playing formats to midweek.

The majority of sports field lights are club owned and maintained but many are old and due for an upgrade or replacement. Many of the fixtures and fittings are now obsolete and unable to be replaced and poles are not capable of supporting new lighting technology.

Existing floodlit sports fields are also often over-used, compromising surface quality and leaving little time between seasonal changeovers to facilitate turf repair and recovery. This has a significant cost impact on maintenance budgets.

Floodlights are provided predominantly by clubs who are responsible for fundraising, consenting and permissions. Installing, operating and maintaining floodlights can be financially and logistically challenging. The demand for floodlit training space makes it difficult to generate potential opportunities for code and club collaboration, joint ventures, or partnerships to share costs and ownership. Club ownership can also restrict or prevent use by other sports or groups.

There is opportunity to link new floodlight provision with the introduction of artificial turfs. A network of floodlit artificial turfs will take the pressure off existing floodlit natural turf. The use of floodlights, while providing a range of benefits, can also increase emissions from sports fields. Energy efficient and renewable energy options should be considered as part of these investments wherever possible.



## Changing climate conditions

Sports fields have a role to play in helping Council meet some of the challenge of climate change. The development of our sports field network should be considered in the context of contributing to a healthy recreational environment where practicable – healthy water bodies, biodiversity, stewardship, sustainable use of resources, emissions reductions, and resilience to climate change.

Optimising the sports field network can provide a range of environmental benefits including reduced emissions (and cost) from construction, maintenance, and operations.

Prioritisation of sports fields within walkable catchments and close to public transport (including proposed Mass Rapid Transit), and cycle routes can support Council’s target to halve our district’s emissions by 2030.

Properly designed artificial turf may be used to reduce flood risk to surrounding properties and infrastructure in severe weather events. Climate change and sea level rise increase the flooding risks. Therefore, appropriate flood management must be integrated with the use of artificial turf to leverage the benefits it provides while avoiding transfer of risk and harm onto the community.

The release of microplastics as turf breaks down is an environmental concern. On 26 April 2023 the European Commission voted to support a ban on the sale of intentionally added microplastics, after a transition period of eight years. Based on their definition of intentionally added microplastics, this restriction will include polymeric infill materials (e.g. rubber crumb) used in artificial turf surfaces. We should anticipate similar legislation being implemented in NZ and should plan accordingly.



English Park

# The way forward

Sports fields take time to plan, build and develop, and our network programme needs to allow for this. A well-planned development programme over the long term will help avoid having insufficient, poorly located or poor quality sports fields that are not ‘fit for purpose’ or meeting community needs. It will also ensure investment is targeted and effective and will help deliver co-benefits to our natural environment supporting a resilient and low emissions city.

We need to be strategic in our planning to ensure that sports fields are developed appropriately and are flexible enough to support changes in community needs. Sports field development will need to help Council achieve other plans and strategic objectives such as building a collaborative confident city, a green liveable city, a cultural powerhouse city and a thriving prosperous city.

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**To achieve our goal of more New Zealanders with better places to play sport, we have to make better decisions about sporting facilities.<sup>4</sup>**

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Multi-sports zone (MSZ) playing space concept

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<sup>4</sup> The New Zealand Sporting Facilities Framework ([www.sportnz.org.nz](http://www.sportnz.org.nz))

The following goals are aligned with the community outcomes defined in Council’s Strategic framework.

# Goal 1: Play where you live

## ‘Strong sense of community’

Safe and accessible sports fields support healthy, diverse and connected communities

### Participate locally wherever possible

A network of local sports field areas contributes to making organised sports participation accessible for children in the early development stages of their lives by reducing cost barriers for families, such as high transport costs and interruptions to the parents’ working day.

A network of local sports field areas also helps build active, healthy and connected communities.

Promoting active transport initiatives as a means of enabling local communities to mitigate growing concerns about the negative impact of climate change associated with burning fossil fuels reinforces an increasing need for local provision wherever possible.

A local community-based sports field network that can be easily accessed (within 1km or 12 minutes walking distance of all homes) by those who want to participate in junior sport (ages 5–12 years) provides the best opportunity to minimise the negative impacts generated by vehicle-based travel to destination parks.

Beyond walkable catchments, prioritisation of sports fields close to public transport (including proposed Mass Rapid Transit) and cycle routes and within priority development areas can increase access, optimise use of facilities, reduce emissions and support high quality intensification.

Building resilient and inclusive communities enhances the notion that anywhere in Christchurch is a great place to live. Building strong communities requires us to provide for equitable access for all families and means travel and associated costs are not significant barriers to participation. This is particularly important for children aged 5–12 years old, noting that this is where numbers of formal sports participants are highest.

The provision of multi-sport zone playing spaces is one means of supporting the goal of play where you live. This type of recreational sports surface may also be referenced in the Play Space Network Plan once it is completed.

### To achieve Goal 1, we need to:

- 1.1 Provide flexible spaces that can be used by all, whether formal sports groups or casual recreational demand such as multi-sport zone playing spaces.
- 1.2 Improve areas within local parks and reserves to accommodate training needs for children’s sport in particular with careful consideration of the other demands on our parks such as tree canopy coverage.
- 1.3 Develop community partnerships to secure community use of other providers’ sports fields, e.g. schools.
- 1.4 Where no other option is available seek to acquire – purchasing land in suburbs where the gap between demand and provision cannot be met by repurposing or sharing initiatives.
- 1.5 Prioritise investment in sports fields within walkable catchments, close to public transport and priority development areas to reduce emissions and support the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan.

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**When clubs and codes and communities make decisions in isolation, we end up with too many of one kind of facility and not enough of another.<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1411/nz-facilities-framework.pdf>



# Goal 2: Participate for life

## Modern and robust city infrastructure and community facilities

‘Inā noa atu te tangata, te mahi’  
More people, more active, more often’

### Enable play for life

A network of multi-code accessible and floodlit sports field areas evenly distributed across the city provides opportunities for all to participate and does not place additional demand on existing playing areas.

Weather related impacts are minimised allowing sports participation to progress in typical weather-related events.

Sports fields accommodate changing community demands and support planned city growth and intensification.

Sports field provision is as flexible as possible to meet the competing and changing needs of the community, for example mid-week competitions, casual use, decrease in demand of a particular sport.

Locations support all community sports within geographical areas connected to multi-mode active transport options wherever possible, such as major cycle and public transport routes, which in turn support the Mass Rapid Transit Indicative Business Case.

Negative impacts associated with night time use for training and competition in residential areas are minimised.

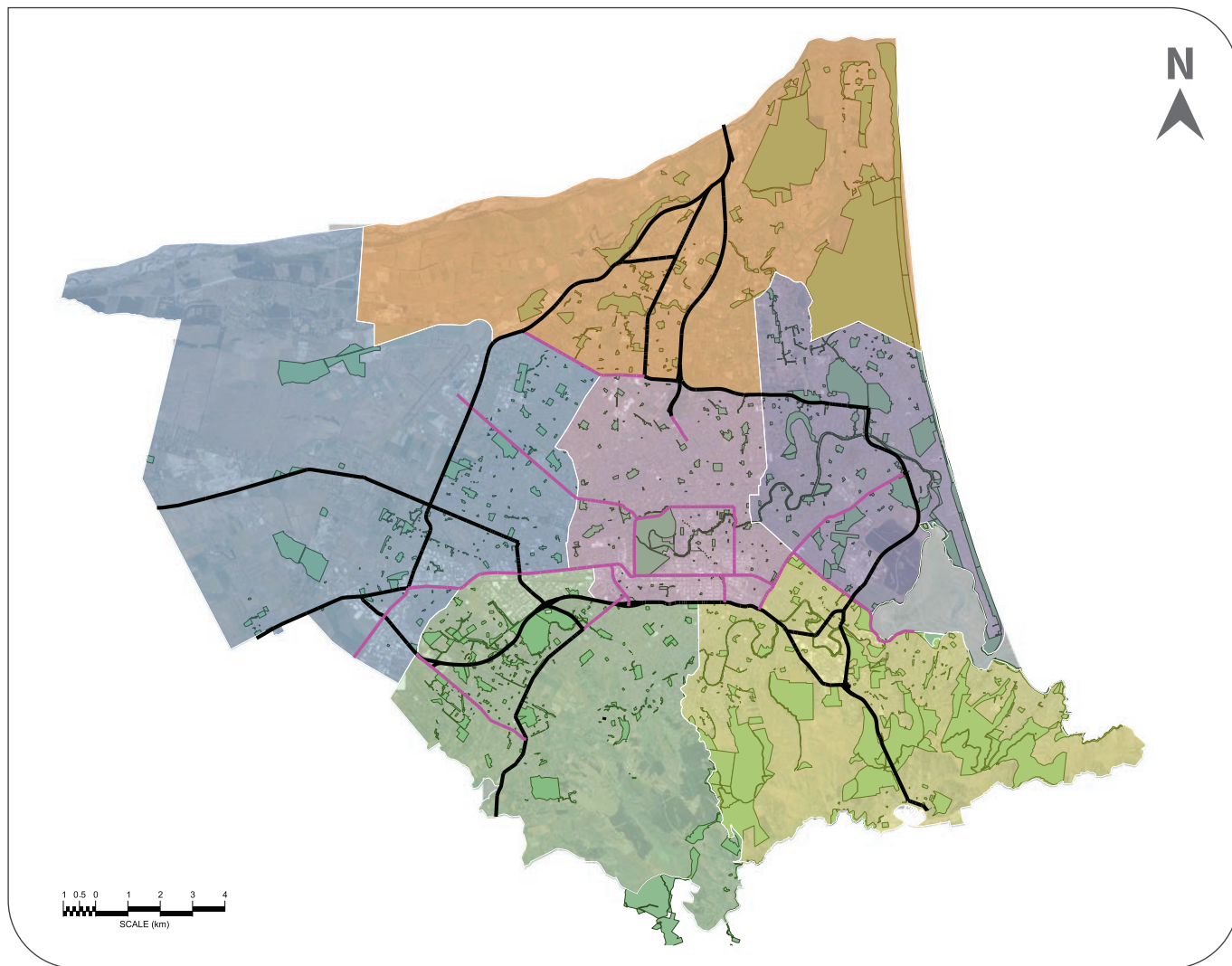
Desirable community and parkland outcomes such as improving our urban forest canopy, biodiversity outcomes and community well-being associated with parkland and open space availability are protected and maintained.

### To achieve Goal 2, we need to:

- 2.1 Provide sufficient capacity to meet the current demand and predicted growth in the most cost effective manner, whilst preserving as much open space for non-sport purposes as possible.
- 2.2 Build well distributed dedicated facilities such as artificial turfs, and dedicated flood lit training areas in locations that connect to active transport routes, and which do not impact negatively on residential areas or other parkland priorities.
- 2.3 Improve existing infrastructure to ensure we have the most efficient use of existing resources.
- 2.4 Invest in surface water management as part of upgrading sports fields to optimise usability while building resilience to the impacts of climate change.



## Proposed catchment areas for artificial turf hubs



### Legend

#### Roads

- State highway
- Major arterial road

#### Boundaries

- Central
- Eastern
- Western
- Northern
- South Eastern
- South Western

# Goal 3: Succeed

## ‘Celebration of our identity through arts, culture, heritage, sport and recreation’

Enabling emerging talent to thrive

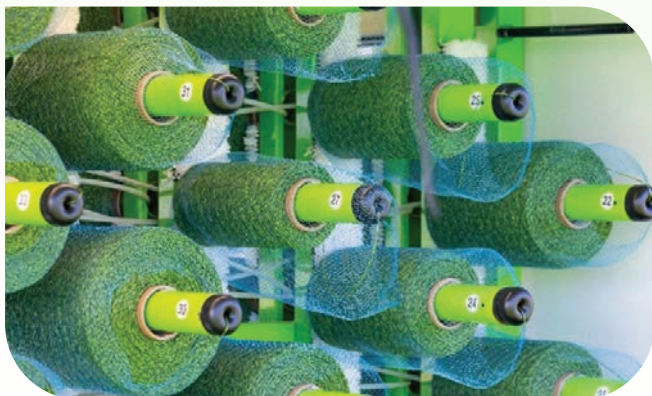
### Provide opportunities for player development using an environmentally sound and well balanced supporting infrastructure

Christchurch is a place of choice for community sports development through provision of appropriate facilities to enable communities and clubs to prosper equitably.

The quality of the primary field of play for all clubs aligns with the requirements of the regional sporting organisation.

The benefits of improved turf technology for improving sports field resiliency and avoiding the impact of high maintenance costs are adopted.

The important role that open spaces and parks will increasingly play in managing the impacts of a changing climate is acknowledged, whilst enabling the primary purpose of sports parks to support sport.



Hybrid turf stitching machine

### To achieve Goal 3, we need to:

- 3.1 In partnership with the RSOs, determine and prioritise future capital investment programmes to inform annual and long term plans.
- 3.2 Develop solutions that deliver a primary field of play for all community clubs to an above average quality as measured by our condition assessment model.
- 3.3 Invest capital in more robust community sports fields’ infrastructure that enables player performance and development.
- 3.4 Invest capital in community sports fields’ infrastructure to improve field resiliency against the impact of high use, such as ‘hybrid’ turf and alternative irrigation technology.
- 3.5 Ensure the city’s sports field infrastructure is of a quality that it can support regional, national and where appropriate, international events to be hosted by the city.
- 3.6 Partner with private and educational entities to align objectives and invest in the most sensible manner to support the city’s aspirations.



Trialling alternative sub-surface irrigation in a community sports field



## Implementation and funding

The detailed Action Plan (see Appendix 2) sets out ongoing, immediate and longer-term actions to provide and develop our sports field network. Actions are targeted and coordinated, taking a manageable, incremental approach to providing and developing our sports field network over the next 10 years.

- Some of the actions are already funded under existing projects and Council operations.
- Actions that require additional investment in new projects or purchase of land are identified and will need to be considered as part of long term and annual plan budgeting processes.

## Monitoring and review

One of the actions in the Sports Field Network Plan is to develop a monitoring programme, so that we can assess our progress towards providing and developing our sports field network to meet the changing needs of our community.

- We will review the Sports Field Network Plan regularly to evaluate how we are tracking against our goals. Results from the review will be used to inform future long term plan decisions.



# Appendix 1 – How we developed the plan

## Purpose

The purpose of this Sports Field Network Plan is to identify current issues and opportunities, options and goals for the development of the network of sports fields and associated infrastructure in Christchurch during the next 10 years.

By implementing the plan, we will be able to:

- capture what is working well or requires improvement and where gaps exist
- understand existing issues and opportunities in response to changing community needs
- establish clear and concise goals to help guide and prioritise sports field investment

The plan does not identify provision for individual sports. The intention is for the network of sports fields to be as flexible as possible, recognising that demand and use change over time and that sports also use non-Council facilities. It seeks to guide equitable sports field provision and development based on community needs.

This Sports Field Network Plan will sit alongside other documents and plans that contribute to the delivery of Council's community outcomes and guide policy or investment priorities.

The overall required outcome is efficient and effective provision of sports fields that enable equitable community sport participation, growth and development for all citizens, sporting codes and levels of play.

## Scope

This plan focusses on provision of sports fields that are located on Council land within the Christchurch City boundary.

It does not specifically address associated sports field infrastructure such as changing rooms.

## Methodology

We accessed data from the annual Sport Report for the past five years on the number of clubs, teams and games played for each sport by reviewing each sporting code's match and training schedules for 2022 on the relevant website.

We reviewed populations and housing trends by studying data from Statistics New Zealand.

We used the Council GIS and asset management data to quantify the number of sports fields available and to produce maps showing the location of sports and community parks. We then used this information to identify areas of the city where the distance to a park was more than 1km.



Lancaster Park opening June 2022

## Consultation and feedback

In the development of the Sports Field Network Plan Council staff engaged with stakeholders who represent the key sporting groups and organisations that use the sports fields in the summer and winter sports seasons, and who manage weekly sports opportunities and events for tamariki and rangatahi in Waitaha. These stakeholders included:

- Sport Canterbury – an independent regional sports trust for Waitaha, dedicated to fostering community and connection through sports. Sport Canterbury is one of 17 regional sports trusts under the umbrella of Sport New Zealand.
- The six largest regional sports organisations who have Council sports fields allocated to them for the summer and winter sports seasons:
  - Canterbury Rugby
  - Canterbury Rugby League
  - Christchurch Metro Cricket and Canterbury Cricket
  - Canterbury Softball
  - Mainland Football
  - Touch Canterbury

Collectively, these regional organisations represent the majority of community sports clubs playing on sports fields in Christchurch.

- Independent organisations set up to manage weekly sports opportunities and events for tamariki and rangatahi in Waitaha (School Sports Canterbury, Primary Sports Canterbury). Membership of these organisations consists of primary, intermediate and secondary schools throughout Canterbury.

A minimum of two meetings/workshops were held with these stakeholders, where Council staff presented the draft plan and received feedback. Subsequent meetings were held at the request of Mainland Football and Canterbury Softball with their respective clubs, where Council staff received further feedback. There was also a meeting held with the Secondary School Regional Sports directors with the information sent out to all secondary schools in Ōtautahi.

The majority of the feedback received at the meetings and workshops was focused on operational detail rather than on the strategic direction of the plan. However, there was general support for establishing a network of six hubs around the city where we are proposing to put artificial turf.

One of the key outcomes agreed through the engagement with the key stakeholders is that the prioritisation of the projects implemented from the plan would be agreed in consultation with the regional sports organisations through regular seasonal meetings and using an agreed decision-making matrix (Goal: Succeed. Objective 3.2) This process will help ensure that community sports clubs, through their regional organisations, will continue to have a voice as the plan is delivered.

The plan's framework also has other key actions recognising the importance of ongoing collaboration with the Regional Sports Organisations, including working with them to evaluate the city's network of floodlights (Goal 2, Objective 2.1) and seeking ongoing feedback on the performance of sports fields (Goal 3, Objective 3.1).



## Appendix 2 – Action plan in detail

# 1

### Goal 1: Play where you live 'Strong sense of community'

**Objective 1.1 Quantify the type and location of sports field network required to meet current and future community sporting needs taking into account the Play Space Network Plan once it is completed.**

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Identify and investigate the geographical zones in the city with insufficient land to support Goal 1		✓	
Determine the number, location and configuration of multi-sport zone playing spaces required to meet current and future community sports field training needs and install them	✓	✓	✓

**Objective 1.2 Develop alternative and/or additional sources and locations of sports field provision**

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Clearly identify locations suitable to support current and future community sports field training needs	✓	✓	
Determine whether we need to secure additional sports field capacity for community use on privately owned or school fields	✓	✓	
Investigate opportunities to collaborate with lease holders of existing non sports field spaces to provide potential community multi-purpose sports activity	✓	✓	

**Objective 1.3 Upgrade or renew existing sports fields in a cost-effective manner**

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Work with the NSOs and RSOs to determine and prioritise capital investment programmes to improve areas within local parks and reserves	✓	✓	✓
Improve our asset information to drive effective investment decisions	✓	✓	✓

# 2

## Goal 2: Participate for life Modern and robust city infrastructure and community facilities

### Objective 2.1 Develop a city-wide network of dedicated floodlit artificial turf sports fields

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Work with the RSO's to Investigate the optimum placement of floodlit artificial surfaces in select locations of the city		✓	
Ensure the optimum placement of floodlit artificial locations is integrated with the Greater Christchurch Spatial Plan and proposed Mass Rapid Transit Indicative Business Case and any other relevant Council plans.		✓	
Prepare and implement the staged delivery of the artificial turf network	✓	✓	✓

### Objective 2.2 Protect the investment in sports field facilities

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Provide appropriate supporting infrastructure to maximise the use of the sports field network (e.g. changing rooms, storage)	✓	✓	✓
Design and construct any new or upgraded sports field so that it can support climate resilience by increasing its ability to store rainfall in severe weather events, helping to protect our communities from harm and keep ongoing operational costs at a sustainable level.	✓	✓	✓

Photo: Matty Louis Photography



# 3

## Goal 3: Succeed

‘Celebration of our identity through arts, culture, heritage, sport and recreation.’

**Objective 3.1 Improve sports field quality by upgrading turf systems e.g. improved drainage and irrigation, installation of hybrid turf systems and managing use so that the grass surface allows sport development and performance at a higher community level**

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Design and implement an objective method for regular and consistent objective feedback on the condition and performance of our sports fields	✓	✓	✓
Design and implement an objective method for prioritising sports fields to be investigated for potential upgrades	✓	✓	✓
Monitor and adjust to specific requirements as implemented by National Sports Organisations (NSO) for community sport delivery	✓	✓	✓
Evaluate and implement new and emerging hybrid turf, drainage and irrigation technology for maximising the use, resilience and longevity of new and existing natural turf sports fields	✓	✓	✓

**Objective 3.2 Provide surface quality of suitable standard to host inter-regional competitions (including professional and semi-professional franchise competitions involving teams from outside New Zealand) and/or to serve as a national high-performance training hub**

Action	Funding	Implementation timeframe	
		2024–2026	2027–2034
Work with the NSOs and RSOs to determine and prioritise capital investment programmes	✓	✓	✓



Ngā Puna Wai Sports Hub

# **Our Sports Field Network Plan**

for Ōtautahi Christchurch  
2024