

# Future Use of Coolham Playing Fields

## **Community Consultation July 2025 - Executive Summary**

Author: NNS Consulting

### Introduction

We are pleased to share a summary of the recent community consultation regarding the future use of Coolham Playing Fields and proposed biodiversity enhancements led by **Greener Shipley**.

The consultation included:

- A public meeting at Coolham Village Hall (22 March 2025)
- Engagement with local schools
- Written submissions from residents and stakeholders
- Feedback via community correspondence and social media

The purpose was to gather views on how the Playing Fields might support nature recovery while preserving their historic and ongoing role as an open recreational space.

### Background

Coolham Playing Fields consist of two adjoining areas (East and West Fields) beside Coolham Village Hall.

- The **East Field** was gifted to Shipley Parish Council in 1957 by Laura Kaye with a covenant that it be maintained “as and for the purposes of a recreation ground.”
- The **West Field** was acquired later.

For decades, the fields have hosted stoolball, youth football, dog training, fitness classes, nursery activities, reenactments, village events and informal recreation. Many residents describe them as the only freely accessible open recreational space in the parish.

### Key Themes from the Consultation

#### **1. Strong Affection for the Existing Open Space**

Across all engagement channels, there is a deep attachment to the fields. Residents value:

- A large, safe and visible space for children’s play
- Informal sport and community gatherings
- Clear sightlines for safeguarding
- A sense of openness and freedom

- The historic purpose of the land as a recreation ground

There is strong support for retaining substantial open green space for football, games, and events.

## 2. Support for Biodiversity – With Proportionate Change

Many respondents expressed support for environmental stewardship and improving biodiversity. Suggestions included:

- Enhancing hedgerows and tree lines
- Native tree and shrub planting
- Stream improvements
- Wildlife habitats (bird and bat boxes, bug hotels)
- Limited “no-mow” areas

However, there were concerns about large-scale or permanent changes that could:

- Reduce usable open space
- Affect football pitch viability
- Create safeguarding or safety risks (e.g. ponds)
- Impact Montessori and nursery use
- Restrict visibility across the field

The clear message: **nature improvements are welcome, provided they do not compromise recreation, safety or accessibility.**

## 3. Children and Young People’s Views

Pupils from Shipley CE Primary School and William Penn School showed strong enthusiasm for:

- Wildlife habitats and nature areas
- New adventure play equipment
- Bike paths and wheeled sports features
- Retaining the existing football pitch
- More benches and shaded areas

Importantly, children also expressed a desire to **keep open space for running and games**, demonstrating an appreciation for balance between nature and play.

## 4. Governance and Legal Considerations

Several respondents highlighted:

- The 1957 covenant governing the East Field
- The respective roles of Shipley Parish Council (Custodian Trustee) and the Coolham Village Hall Charity
- The need for clarity on authority and long-term accountability

There was strong support for transparency and ensuring any decisions align with legal obligations and community mandate.

## **5. Practical Concerns**

Residents raised questions about:

- Long-term maintenance responsibilities and funding
- Drainage and ground conditions
- Dog waste management
- Infrastructure improvements (paths, benches, car park)

Many suggested that improving existing facilities may be a priority before introducing new structural features.

## **Overall Conclusion**

The consultation demonstrates:

- **Overwhelming appreciation for Coolham Playing Fields as an open, flexible recreation space**
- **Widespread support for modest, well-managed biodiversity enhancements**
- **Concern about large-scale or permanent changes that reduce open access**
- **A strong desire for transparency, collaboration and phased decision-making**

The central challenge is to balance nature recovery with the fields' historic purpose and valued community use.

## **Proposed Way Forward**

In light of the feedback received, the Parish Council and Greener Shipley are exploring small, proportionate enhancements that respect the character of the fields and preserve open space. These include:

- Improving and strengthening existing hedges along the A272 and central hedge
- Making more of a feature of the central dividing hedge
- Planting carefully located native trees that do not encroach on playing areas

- Revitalising the southern tree line
- Considering a small, contained “no-mow” biodiversity area
- Repairing and adding benches
- Exploring sustainable dog waste solutions
- Establishing a “Friends of Coolham Playing Fields” group

A recent site visit involving Greener Shipley, Green Man Services and an ecologist has assessed the suitability of these lower-impact options.

### **Commitment to Ongoing Engagement**

Shipley Parish Council and Greener Shipley recognise that Coolham Playing Fields are a treasured community asset.

We are committed to:

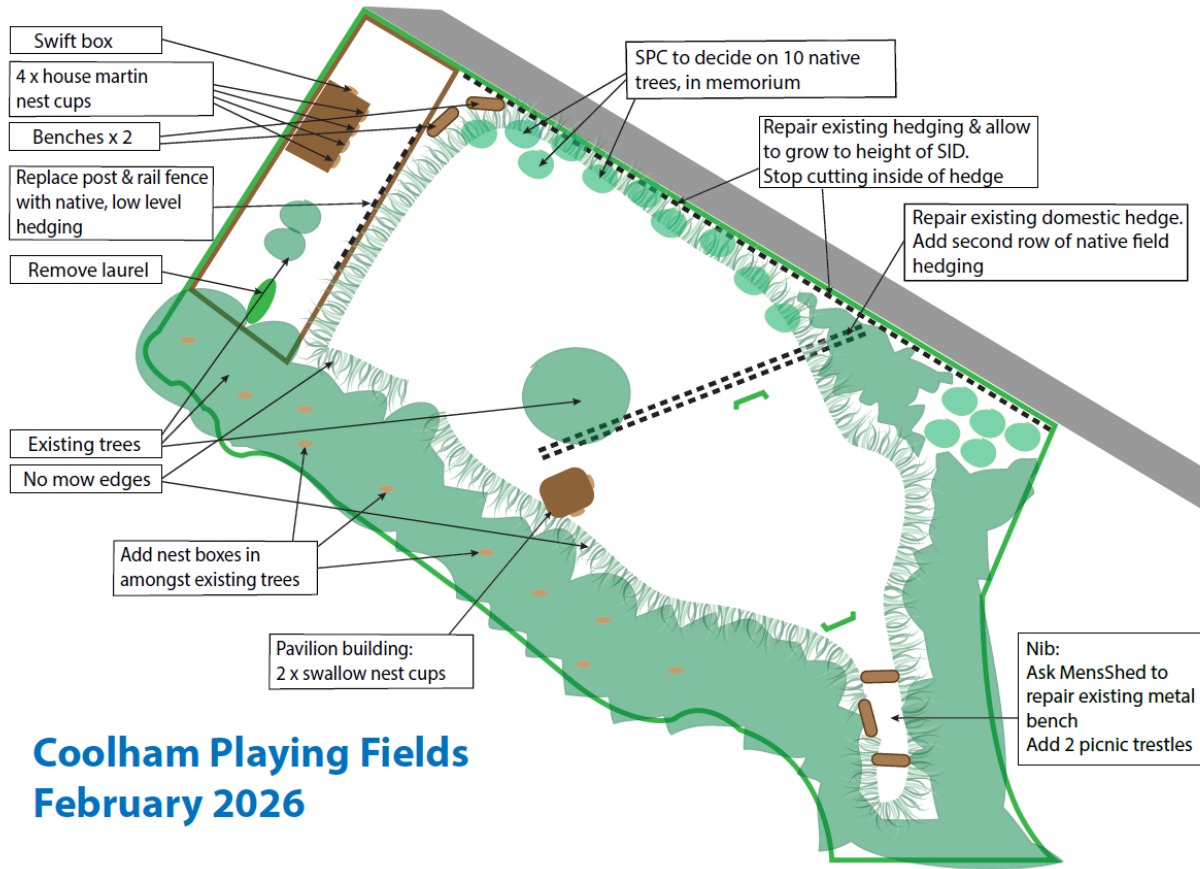
- Maintaining transparency
- Clarifying governance responsibilities
- Phasing any changes carefully
- Continuing community engagement

Thank you to everyone who contributed their views. Your thoughtful input has directly shaped the direction of travel.

If you would like to be involved in the proposed “Friends of Coolham Playing Fields” group, please contact:

**[GreenerShipley@gmail.com](mailto:GreenerShipley@gmail.com)**

Together, we can ensure that Coolham Playing Fields remain a thriving, inclusive and well-loved space for generations to come.



## Coolham Playing Fields February 2026